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Features :

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The UAE-India corridor is sparking a growth story

Source: The post **"The UAE-India corridor is sparking a growth story"** has been created, based on **"The UAE-India corridor is sparking a growth story"** published in **"The Hindu" on 16th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations

Context: The economic partnership between **India** and **United Arab Emirates** has transformed into a dynamic growth corridor that integrates trade, investment, technology, and people-to-people ties. The signing of the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** in 2022 accelerated bilateral trade, allowing the countries to reach the $100-billion trade target five years earlier than planned. This corridor now represents a model of how strategic alignment of policy, capital, and execution can drive mutual economic growth.

Scale and Depth of the Economic Corridor

I. Trade Expansion

1. Bilateral trade between India and the UAE crossed $100 billion rapidly and has now been targeted to reach $200 billion by 2032, reflecting strong economic momentum.
2. Non-oil trade reached about $65 billion and grew nearly 20 percent, indicating that the partnership has diversified beyond traditional hydrocarbon trade.
3. The expansion of trade in sectors such as gems and jewellery, electronics, food processing, and services demonstrates deeper integration of supply chains.

II. Investment Flows

1. UAE entities have invested more than $22 billion in India across infrastructure, logistics, healthcare, and technology sectors.
2. Indian companies have invested over $16 billion in the UAE in manufacturing, construction, renewable energy, and services industries.
3. Companies like **Reliance Industries**, **Ashok Leyland**, and **Larsen & Toubro** are executing major industrial projects in the UAE, showing long-term commitment.
4. UAE companies such as **DP World**, **Emirates NBD**, and **ADNOC** are investing heavily in Indian infrastructure, banking, and energy sectors.

III. Human and Connectivity Links

1. Nearly five million Indians live in the UAE and form its largest expatriate community, strengthening cultural and economic relations.
2. More than 1,200 weekly flights between the two countries facilitate tourism, trade, and professional exchanges.
3. These people-to-people ties create trust and business networks that sustain long-term cooperation.

Key Drivers Behind the Corridor's Success

I. Policy Architecture

1. CEPA removed tariffs on about 90 percent of goods, reducing trade barriers and encouraging business expansion.
2. The Bilateral Investment Treaty of 2024 strengthened investor confidence through dispute-resolution mechanisms and protection guarantees.
3. Strategic defence and security cooperation increased political trust and stability, which are essential for long-term investments.

II. Sectoral Diversification

1. The corridor has moved beyond oil trade into advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, financial services, logistics, and healthcare sectors.
2. Joint projects in solar energy, electric mobility, low-carbon chemicals, and fintech demonstrate a shift towards sustainable and innovation-driven growth.

3. Indian banks, IT firms, and healthcare providers are building operational presence in the UAE, strengthening service sector integration.

Emerging Areas of Cooperation

I. Artificial Intelligence and Digital Economy

1. India hosting the **AI Impact Summit** reflects its rising role in shaping global AI governance and innovation.
2. The UAE, which invested early in AI infrastructure and policy frameworks, is collaborating with India on data centres, cloud computing, and AI-driven industrial applications.
3. Cooperation in AI can improve productivity in sectors like logistics, healthcare, energy management, and urban planning.

II. Third-Country Market Expansion

1. The **Bharat Mart** project in the UAE will act as a global distribution hub for Indian goods to Africa, West Asia, and Eurasia.
2. India and the UAE are exploring joint digital infrastructure and capacity-building projects in Africa, which can enhance their geopolitical influence.
3. Such initiatives convert a bilateral partnership into a global economic platform.

Significance for India

1. The corridor boosts India's exports, supports manufacturing growth, and increases foreign direct investment inflows.
2. The UAE acts as a gateway for Indian firms to access European, African, and Middle Eastern markets, aiding global expansion.
3. Long-term LNG supply agreements improve India's energy security and reduce supply disruptions.
4. Collaboration in AI and advanced technology strengthens India's digital economy and innovation ecosystem.
5. Employment opportunities in the UAE support remittances and improve livelihoods for Indian workers.

Challenges and Concerns

1. Political instability in West Asia could disrupt trade routes and investments.
2. Differences in regulatory systems, taxation, and labour laws may create operational challenges for companies.
3. Overdependence on expatriate labour markets can create social and economic vulnerabilities.
4. Trade imbalances may occur if diversification is not sustained and domestic industries are not strengthened.

Way Forward

1. Both countries should expand CEPA into services, digital trade, and startup ecosystems.
2. They should establish joint AI research centres and innovation funds.
3. They should enhance logistics connectivity through ports, shipping corridors, and multimodal transport.
4. They should promote sustainable practices in energy, labour standards, and climate cooperation.

Conclusion: The India–UAE corridor demonstrates how strategic policy alignment, strong diaspora links, and sustained investments can transform bilateral relations into a global growth engine. As both economies integrate further into technology, infrastructure, and third-country markets, this corridor can become a model for South-South economic cooperation and global value chain integration.

Question: The India–UAE economic corridor has evolved from an energy-based relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership. Discuss the key drivers, opportunities, and challenges in the growing ties between India and United Arab Emirates.

Source: The Hindu

FTAs as a Catalyst for India's Electronics Export Surge

Source: The post **"FTAs as a Catalyst for India's Electronics Export Surge"** has been created, based on **"How FTAs could offer India a $1 trillion electronics export window, with caveats"** published in **"Indian Express" on 16th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Indian Economy

Context: India's electronics sector is emerging as one of the fastest-growing export sectors, and proposed free trade agreements with major markets like the **European Union** and the **United States** could open a massive export window. Together, these markets account for nearly one-third of global electronics demand, creating the potential for India to target exports worth up to $1 trillion in the long term. However, India must address structural challenges in supply chains, technology capability, and research and development to fully benefit from these FTAs.

Opportunities from FTAs

a) Access to Large Markets

1. The EU and the US together have an electronics demand of about $1.6 trillion, offering a huge export opportunity for Indian manufacturers.
2. India currently exports less than $9 billion worth of electronics to the EU, despite a potential market of more than $300 billion, showing significant untapped scope.
3. FTAs can reduce tariffs, remove non-tariff barriers, and improve standards recognition, making Indian products more competitive.

b) Boost to Manufacturing Growth

1. Electronics is already India's second-largest export sector and employs over two million workers directly.
2. FTAs can increase demand for Indian electronics manufacturing hubs in states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
3. Higher exports can create multiplier effects in logistics, component manufacturing, and services industries.

c) Integration into Global Value Chains

1. FTAs can attract global firms looking to diversify supply chains away from China.
2. Companies such as **Apple Inc.** and **Samsung Electronics** have already expanded manufacturing in India.
3. Better trade access can help India become a reliable alternative manufacturing base in electronics.

d) Strategic and Geopolitical Gains

1. Trade deals with advanced economies can reduce India's dependence on imports from **China** and strengthen supply chain resilience.
2. Rules-of-origin provisions in FTAs can prevent indirect imports and encourage domestic value addition.

Key Challenges and Caveats

a) Import Dependence for Components

1. India remains heavily dependent on imports of semiconductors, integrated circuits, batteries, and display units.
2. Imports of electronic components from China and Hong Kong alone account for more than half of India's total imports in this sector.
3. Without local component manufacturing, export competitiveness will remain limited.

b) Weak Presence in High-Value Segments

1. India is competitive mainly in mobile phone assembly and telecom equipment but has a negligible share in chips, displays, and batteries.
2. Chips account for nearly one-third of global electronics demand, but India's export share in this category remains extremely low.
3. This limits India's ability to capture value in global electronics supply chains.

c) Low Research and Development Spending

1. India's Gross Expenditure on R&D is about 0.64% of GDP, which is far lower than countries like Japan, South Korea, and China.
2. Successful electronics manufacturing nations have maintained high R&D spending and strong industry-government coordination.
3. Without innovation capability, India may remain stuck in low-value assembly operations.

d) Global Competition

1. Emerging electronics hubs such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam are rapidly building semiconductor ecosystems.
2. These countries offer strong incentives, skilled workforce availability, and integrated supply chains.
3. India must compete with them on infrastructure, logistics, and policy stability.

Government Initiatives to Address Challenges

1. The India Semiconductor Mission aims to build domestic chip fabrication and packaging capacity.
2. Production-Linked Incentive schemes encourage smartphone, laptop, and component manufacturing.
3. A new scheme for passive electronics components is aimed at deepening local value addition.
4. WTO disputes with the EU over ICT tariffs have been resolved to facilitate smoother trade.

Way Forward

1. India must develop a complete electronics ecosystem including semiconductors, batteries, and displays.
2. It should increase R&D spending through public-private partnerships and university–industry collaboration.
3. It should invest in logistics infrastructure, ports, and reliable power supply to improve competitiveness.
4. Skill development programmes should be expanded to create a specialised electronics workforce.
5. India should ensure stable and predictable trade policies to attract long-term investments.

Conclusion: FTAs with the EU and the US offer India a historic opportunity to expand electronics exports and become a global manufacturing hub. However, this opportunity can be realised only if India strengthens domestic supply chains, boosts innovation, and moves up the electronics value chain. With strategic reforms and sustained investment, India can transform its electronics sector into a trillion-dollar export engine.

Question: Free Trade Agreements with major markets such as the European Union and the United States could open a trillion-dollar export opportunity for India's electronics sector. Discuss the opportunities, challenges, and policy measures required for India to realise this potential.

Source: Indian Express

Bridging a divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service'

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Governance

Introduction

India's governance structure was built after Independence around generalist administrators who ensured stability during nation-building. Over time, policy challenges became deeply scientific, technological, and environmental. Scientists entered government, but service rules did not evolve accordingly. This institutional mismatch has limited the effective use of scientific expertise in policymaking. The proposal for an Indian Scientific Service seeks to correct this structural gap and make science a regular partner in governance.

About the Indian Scientific Service

1. **Core institutional idea:** The **Indian Scientific Service (ISS)** is proposed as a permanent national scientific cadre working within government institutions.
2. **Purpose within governance:** It seeks to make scientific expertise a regular and structured part of policymaking rather than a temporary advisory input.
3. **Complementary administrative role:** The service is intended to work alongside civil services, combining administrative coordination with scientific evidence and risk assessment.
4. **Institutional objective:** The aim is to integrate scientific knowledge directly into governance processes for more informed and resilient public decisions.

Need for structured scientific role in governance

1. **Expansion of technically intensive sectors:** Government responsibilities now include climate change, environmental protection, public health, disaster management, nuclear safety, biotechnology, oceans, space science, and artificial intelligence, making scientific knowledge indispensable.
2. **Growing policy complexity:** Many public decisions require specialised expertise, risk assessment, and long-term evaluation rather than only administrative judgement.
3. **Institutional mismatch with governance evolution:** Service rules designed for early nation-building did not adjust to the scientific transformation of governance functions.
4. **Limited regular integration of science:** Scientific expertise is often consulted when needed but is not structurally embedded as a continuous component of policymaking.
5. **Need for anticipatory research:** Effective governance requires sustained research that identifies emerging risks and future challenges rather than responding only to immediate demands.

Major concerns in the existing system

1. **Different professional career pathways:** Administrative services rely on competitive examinations, while scientific careers develop through specialised education, research, and peer evaluation.
2. **Lack of structured institutional preparation for scientists:** Administrators receive role-specific governance training, but scientists lack comparable institutional orientation within government.
3. **Administrative rules restricting professional functioning:** Scientists operate under conduct and appraisal systems designed mainly for general administrative roles.
4. **Limited institutional authority of scientific expertise:** Technical inputs may not carry formal decision-making weight even in complex policy areas.
5. **Inadequate institutional recording of scientific assessment:** Governance processes do not consistently allow formal documentation of risks, uncertainties, or long-term consequences.
6. **Short-term use of scientific work:** Scientific research is often commissioned for immediate regulatory or legal needs instead of sustained policy development.
7. **Unclear organisational position of scientists:** Many scientists lack defined career progression and institutional authority within governance structures.

Way forward

1. **Establish a permanent scientific cadre:** Create a national service placing scientists directly within ministries and regulatory bodies as part of policy processes.
2. **Specialised recruitment and professional evaluation:** Selection should reflect advanced scientific training, research competence, and peer-reviewed expertise.
3. **Separate scientific service rules:** Institutional safeguards must protect professional integrity and allow transparent recording of scientific assessments.
4. **Formal recognition of scientific input in decision systems:** Governance must provide mechanisms to place technical analysis and risk evaluation within official processes.
5. **Long-term research support for policymaking:** Sustained scientific work should guide policy through continuous analysis of emerging challenges.

6. **Clear division of institutional roles:** Administrators manage coordination and implementation, while scientists provide technical knowledge and analytical evaluation.
7. **Sector-specific scientific cadres:** Dedicated divisions across environment, climate, water, oceans, public health, disaster resilience, energy, agriculture, technology policy, and regulatory science can support specialised governance needs.
8. **Alignment with national development priorities:** Evidence-informed governance is essential for leadership in environmental protection, public health, and technological advancement.
9. **Learning from international institutional models:** Countries such as France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States maintain dedicated scientific cadres and professional safeguards that ensure transparent and independent scientific input.
10. **Full use of national scientific capacity for global leadership:** Evidence-based governance is necessary for India's leadership in climate action, environmental stewardship, public health, and technological advancement.

Conclusion

Creating an Indian Scientific Service would formally integrate scientific expertise into governance and strengthen evidence-based policymaking. By defining institutional roles, protecting professional integrity, and enabling transparent scientific assessment, it can improve policy resilience. Aligning administrative coordination with scientific knowledge will help India manage complex risks, support national priorities, and build future-ready governance for long-term stability and credibility.

Question for practice:

Examine the need for establishing an Indian Scientific Service to strengthen the integration of scientific expertise into India's governance and policymaking system.

Source: The Hindu

We need fiscal prudence during elections

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

Fiscal prudence often weakens during elections in India as governments expand welfare spending to attract voters. Large cash transfers and assistance schemes are announced close to polls, increasing public expenditure and fiscal pressure. These practices are common across states and political parties. While welfare has social importance, unchecked expansion raises concerns about sustainability, rising debt, and diversion of funds from development. Balancing electoral commitments with financial discipline has become a major governance challenge.

Rise of Election-Time Welfare Spending

1. **Large pre-poll cash transfers:** Governments release major financial assistance close to elections, such as lump-sum transfers and special support payments to beneficiaries. For example, Tamil Nadu transferred ₹5,000 each to 1.31 crore women under **the Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thogai scheme**, creating an immediate ₹6,550 crore expenditure.
2. **Women-centric income schemes dominate:** Direct cash transfers to women have become a major electoral strategy across states. For example, Maharashtra released multiple instalments under Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana before polls, and the ruling alliance won. **In Bihar, ₹10,000 each was transferred to 75 lakh women before** Assembly elections, followed by another electoral victory.

3. **Expansion of promised benefits:** Parties promise higher monthly payments or wider coverage if re-elected, increasing spending commitments. For example, The Tamil Nadu government indicated monthly assistance could rise to ₹2,000 if re-elected, showing expansion tied to elections.
4. **National-level pre-election schemes:** The **₹6,000 annual income support to farmers under PM-Kisan** was launched in **February 2019**, just before Lok Sabha elections.
5. **Shift from goods to recurring income support:** Earlier giveaways included consumer items, but recent schemes focus on regular financial transfers.

Nature and Structural Drivers of the Problem

1. **Blurred boundary between welfare and populism:** Election-time schemes mix social support with political incentives, making policy intent unclear.
2. **Weak linkage to measurable outcomes:** Some schemes provide benefits without performance conditions or clear evaluation mechanisms.
3. **Competitive escalation among parties:** Political rivalry encourages expanding benefits to match or exceed opponents' promises.
4. **Entrenched culture of welfare expansion:** Election-linked handouts have become a regular feature of the political system.
5. **Need for targeted and time-bound design:** Welfare often continues without defined duration or clear administrative efficiency.

Fiscal and Economic Implications

1. **Rising fiscal deficits in states:** Some states undertake large pre-election spending despite already high deficits. For example, **Bihar faced a fiscal deficit of about 6% of GDP, yet announced pre-election schemes worth 4% of GDP.**.
2. **Exceeding fiscal discipline limits:** The 3% fiscal deficit-to-GDP ceiling for states is frequently crossed, turning a limit into a baseline.
3. **Diversion from productive investment:** Pre-poll schemes may exceed capital outlay, reducing funds for job-creating assets and long-term development.
4. **Growing subsidy burden and debt pressure:** Overall state government debt in India remains about 28.5% of GDP, above the recommended 20% threshold, with subsidies rising sharply.
5. **Crowding out development expenditure:** Spending on transfers reduces resources for infrastructure and economic expansion.
6. **Unsustainable policy outcomes:** Some governments roll back promises when fiscal pressure intensifies, as seen in Maharashtra's deficit rise.

Government Fiscal Approach and Macroeconomic Position

1. **Effort to maintain fiscal discipline:** The Union government has reduced the fiscal deficit from 4.8% of GDP (2024–25) to 4.4% (2025–26) and targets 4.3% in 2026–27, showing a clear consolidation path.
2. **Strong economic growth foundation:** GDP growth is estimated at about 7.4%, among the highest globally.
3. **High public investment commitment:** Capital expenditure of ₹12.2 trillion supports infrastructure-led growth.
4. **Balance between growth and sustainability:** Fiscal strategy focuses on maintaining macroeconomic stability in a volatile global environment.

Way Forward

1. **Efficient and targeted welfare delivery:** Support should reach intended beneficiaries through well-designed administrative systems.
2. **Defined duration and measurable outcomes:** Welfare schemes must operate for fixed periods and show clear results.

3. **Contain and rationalise subsidies:** States must control subsidy expansion to avoid fiscal stress.
4. **Protect productive expenditure:** Infrastructure and development spending should not be displaced by election commitments.
5. **Maintain fiscal discipline despite political pressure:** Financial sustainability must guide policy decisions even during electoral cycles.

Conclusion

Election-driven welfare spending has become a central feature of India's political economy, but its fiscal costs are rising steadily. Social support is necessary, yet unchecked expansion weakens financial stability and development priorities. Sustainable governance requires targeted welfare, controlled subsidies, and firm fiscal discipline. Electoral competition must not override long-term economic sustainability and balanced public finances.

Question for practice:

Discuss how election-time welfare spending in India affects fiscal discipline and long-term economic sustainability, with suitable examples from recent state and Union-level policies.

Source: The Hindu

Cities of debt: On the Urban Challenge Fund

Source: The post **"Cities of debt: On the Urban Challenge Fund"** has been created, based on **"Cities of debt: On the Urban Challenge Fund"** published in **"The Hindu" on 17th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: India's rapid urbanisation requires large investments in infrastructure, housing, and basic services. The proposed Urban Challenge Fund encourages cities to raise funds through bonds, loans, and PPPs while the Centre contributes 25% of project costs. However, many urban local bodies lack the fiscal autonomy and administrative capacity required to safely access market finance.

Background: Role of ULBs in Urban Governance

1. Urban local bodies were given constitutional recognition through the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
2. ULBs are responsible for urban planning, water supply, sanitation, housing, roads, and public health services.
3. They are expected to mobilise their own revenues through property tax, user charges, and municipal bonds.
4. In reality, most ULBs remain dependent on State and Central transfers due to weak revenue bases.

Key Issues Highlighted by the Urban Challenge Fund

I. Limited Administrative Capacity

1. Many ULBs do not have proper accounting systems and rely on outdated financial records.
2. There is a shortage of trained municipal staff in finance, engineering, and urban planning.
3. Project implementation delays are common under schemes such as AMRUT, Swachh Bharat Mission Urban 2.0, and Smart Cities Mission.
4. As a result, funds remain underutilised and projects remain incomplete.

II. Weak Fiscal Autonomy

1. State governments control many municipal taxes and limit the fiscal independence of ULBs.
2. Property tax collection remains inefficient due to poor valuation systems and political resistance.
3. ULBs depend heavily on grants under schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and other transfers.
4. Without stable revenue streams, cities cannot build creditworthiness to borrow from markets.

III. Risk of Debt Burden

1. Experiences from other sectors show that borrowing without reforms can create financial stress.

2. The power sector reforms under Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana revealed large implementation gaps.
3. Hospitals under National Health Mission often faced delays in fund releases while continuing services.
4. Similar borrowing pressures on ULBs may lead to higher user charges and reduced affordability of services.

IV. Inequality Among Cities

1. Large and economically strong cities are more likely to attract private finance.
2. Smaller towns and poorer municipalities may be excluded from funding opportunities.
3. Cities may prioritise monetisable assets instead of essential services like slum upgrading and sanitation.

V. Governance and Transparency Concerns

1. The eligibility criteria and application process for the Urban Challenge Fund remain unclear.
2. Lack of transparency may lead to politically influenced allocation of funds.
3. Weak land records, frequent violations of master plans, and poor urban planning reduce investor confidence.

Why Market-Based Financing Alone Is Problematic

1. Market borrowing requires predictable revenues, which most ULBs do not have.
2. Essential services may become profit-oriented and expensive for citizens.
3. Poor households may face higher tariffs and user charges.
4. Urban development priorities may shift toward real estate projects instead of public welfare.

Measures to Strengthen ULB Capacity

I. Fiscal Reforms

1. States should grant greater taxation powers to ULBs.
2. Property tax systems should be modernised using GIS mapping and better valuation.
3. Predictable transfers from Finance Commissions should be ensured.
4. User charges should be rationalised with subsidies for vulnerable groups.

II. Administrative Capacity Building

1. A professional municipal cadre should be created for urban governance.
2. ULB staff should be trained in accounting, PPP management, and municipal bond issuance.
3. Modern accrual-based accounting systems and independent audits should be adopted.

III. Governance Improvements

1. Land records should be digitised and integrated with planning systems.
2. Master plans should be enforced strictly to improve planning discipline.
3. Fund allocation criteria should be transparent and rule-based.

IV. Balanced Financing Model

1. Grants, loans, and PPPs should be used together rather than relying only on market borrowing.
2. Basic urban services should be prioritised before monetisable infrastructure projects.
3. Credit guarantees should be used cautiously to avoid moral hazard.

V. Inclusive Urban Development

1. Policies should protect renters, informal workers, and slum residents.
2. Financing should be linked to service delivery outcomes instead of only revenue generation.
3. Urban planning should focus on affordability and sustainability.

Way Forward

1. Urban infrastructure financing must be supported by strong municipal institutions.
2. Fiscal devolution, administrative reform, and transparent governance are essential before pushing ULBs toward market borrowing.
3. Coordinated efforts by the Centre, States, and ULBs are necessary to build resilient and inclusive cities.

Conclusion: The Urban Challenge Fund is an important step toward improving urban finance. However, without strengthening municipal capacity and fiscal autonomy, cities risk falling into debt traps. Sustainable urban development requires empowered local governments, accountable governance, and inclusive planning.
Question: The success of market-based urban financing depends on the fiscal and administrative strength of Urban Local Bodies. Discuss in the context of the proposed Urban Challenge Fund.

India's federalism is in need of a structural reset

Source: The post **"India's federalism is in need of a structural reset"** has been created, based on **"India's federalism is in need of a structural reset"** published in **"The Hindu" on 17th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Polity
Context: India adopted a federal system with a strong Union to ensure unity after Partition, integration of princely States, and linguistic diversity. Over time, however, constitutional practice has moved toward greater centralisation through legislation, fiscal control, and administrative oversight. Many scholars and political leaders argue that India now needs a structural reset to achieve balanced federalism with autonomous States and an efficient Union.

Constitutional Basis of Indian Federalism

1. India is described as a "Union of States" under the Constitution of India, which provides a federal structure with unitary features.
2. The design drew heavily from the Government of India Act 1935, which concentrated powers in the Centre.
3. Federalism was declared part of the basic structure of the Constitution in S.R. Bommai v. Union of India, affirming that States are not mere administrative units.
4. The Seventh Schedule distributes powers through Union, State, and Concurrent Lists, but residuary powers rest with the Union.

Reasons for Initial Centralisation

1. The trauma of Partition created fears of secession and fragmentation.
2. Integration of more than 500 princely States required a strong central authority.
3. Economic planning in the early decades favoured centralised decision-making.
4. One-party dominance in the early years reinforced the "high command culture" in governance.
5. Emergency provisions such as Article 356 allowed the Centre to intervene in State governance.

Thus, centralisation was historically justified but has persisted even after those conditions changed.

Present Challenges in Union–State Relations

I. Legislative Centralisation

1. The Union increasingly legislates on Concurrent List subjects such as education, agriculture, and labour.
2. National laws sometimes leave little flexibility for States to adapt policies to local conditions.
3. Subordinate legislation and regulations occasionally override State laws in practice.
4. This trend weakens the principle of State autonomy recognised by the Constitution.

II. Fiscal Centralisation

1. States rely heavily on Finance Commission transfers and centrally sponsored schemes.
2. Conditional grants often require States to follow rigid templates designed in New Delhi.
3. Implementation of the Goods and Services Tax reduced States' independent taxation powers.
4. Delays in GST compensation payments created fiscal stress for States.
5. Many States face rising debt while their fiscal flexibility declines.

III. Administrative Centralisation

1. Large Union ministries operate schemes in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture, which are State subjects.
2. Centrally sponsored schemes impose uniform guidelines despite regional differences.
3. Duplication of administrative functions leads to inefficiency and confusion.
4. Policy micromanagement reduces innovation at the State level.

IV. Role of Governors

1. Delays in granting assent to State bills have created constitutional controversies.
2. Governors are sometimes perceived as acting politically rather than neutrally.
3. Such conflicts undermine cooperative federalism and democratic accountability.

V. Weak Intergovernmental Institutions

1. Bodies like the Inter-State Council are rarely used for meaningful policy dialogue.
2. Mechanisms for resolving Centre–State disputes are slow or ineffective.
3. Lack of regular consultation creates mistrust between governments.

Consequences of Excessive Centralisation

1. Policies designed centrally may not suit diverse local conditions.
2. States lose incentives to innovate in governance.
3. Fiscal dependence reduces accountability of State governments to citizens.
4. Administrative overload at the Centre leads to inefficiency.
5. Political tensions increase between Union and State governments.

Importance of Balanced Federalism

1. India's diversity in language, culture, and economy requires decentralised policy solutions.
2. States can act as laboratories of democracy and experiment with innovative policies.
3. Successful State policies can later be adopted nationally.
4. Balanced federalism improves service delivery and accountability.
5. Strong States contribute to a stronger Union.

Examples of State innovations include Tamil Nadu's noon-meal scheme, Kerala's public health model, and Maharashtra's employment guarantee programme.

Recommendations for Structural Reset

I. Legislative Reforms

1. The Union should limit legislation on State subjects unless national uniformity is essential.
2. Pre-legislative consultation with States should be mandatory.
3. Governors' roles should be clarified with time-bound procedures for assent to State bills.

II. Fiscal Reforms

1. Increase untied transfers to States through Finance Commissions.
2. Restore fiscal autonomy by expanding States' taxation powers.
3. Simplify GST structure and ensure timely compensation.
4. Reduce the number of centrally sponsored schemes.

III. **Institutional Reforms**

1. Revitalise the Inter-State Council as a permanent policy forum.
2. Strengthen cooperative decision-making in GST Council.
3. Implement recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and Punchhi Commission on Union–State relations.

IV. Administrative Reforms

1. Encourage decentralised planning at State and local levels.
2. Build administrative capacity of States and local bodies.
3. Reduce duplication between Union and State ministries.

V. Political and Democratic Reforms

1. Encourage constructive Centre–State dialogue rather than confrontation.

2. Respect electoral mandates of State governments.
3. Promote cooperative federalism through NITI Aayog and policy councils.

Way Forward

1. India must right-size the Union so it focuses on defence, foreign policy, macroeconomic stability, and national infrastructure.
2. States should have greater autonomy in health, education, agriculture, and policing.
3. Federalism should evolve with India's maturity as a democracy.
4. Balanced federalism will improve governance outcomes and reduce regional disparities.

Conclusion

India's unity is now strong and resilient, and greater State autonomy will not weaken the nation. A structural reset in federalism will align authority with accountability. Strong States and a focused Union together can ensure inclusive growth, better governance, and democratic stability.

Question: India's federal structure, though constitutionally balanced, has evolved with increasing centralisation. Discuss why India's federalism needs a structural reset. Suggest measures to achieve cooperative and balanced federalism.

Creative Industries as Growth Engines

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy .

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, economic strength is shaped not only by industry but also by ideas, digital platforms, and cultural influence. Creative industries now generate value through technology, intellectual property, and global content flows. These sectors are becoming central to growth, employment, and international competitiveness. India's expanding creative economy reflects this shift, where creativity is emerging as a structured economic capability driving development and global engagement.

Understanding the Creative Economy

1. D**efinition:** The creative economy generates value from creativity, culture, technology, and intellectual property. It includes media, entertainment, animation, gaming, live experiences, and digital platforms operating globally.
2. **Global economic mainstreaming:** Creative industries contribute between **0.5 and over 7 percent of GDP** across countries. Live entertainment creates spillovers for tourism and urban services, linking culture with wider economic activity.
3. **Technology-intensive production systems:** These sectors rely on digital tools, immersive design, and global production pipelines. Creative work is embedded in modern service economies and value chains.

Key Growth Drivers of the Creative Economy

1. **AVGC-XR as innovation driver:** Animation, visual effects, gaming, comics, and extended reality combine creative talent with advanced computing. They produce scalable intellectual property used in global films, streaming platforms, and advertising.
2. **Gaming as mass digital participation:** Millions across metros and small towns engage daily through mobile-based interaction and competition. India is among the world's largest gaming markets with rising monetisation and global platform integration.
3. **Experiential live entertainment ecosystems:** Concerts, festivals, and events attract audiences who travel, spend, and return repeatedly. These activities energise cities, create employment, and strengthen cultural presence globally.

Current Status of India's Creative Economy

1. **Media and entertainment scale:** The sector was valued at **₹2.5 trillion in 2024** with output near **₹3 lakh crore**. It supports **over 10 million livelihoods** directly and indirectly.

2. **Digital revenue shift:** Digital media forms about one-third of sector revenues, reshaping production and distribution systems. Platform-based delivery expands reach across regions and markets.
3. **High-growth segments:** Animation and visual effects around **₹103 billion**, gaming about **₹232 billion**, and live entertainment over **₹100 billion**. These sectors show strong scaling within the media economy.
4. **Growth trajectory:** Revenues may grow about **7 percent annually until 2027**, rising from **₹2,502 billion in 2024 to ₹3,067 billion in 2027**. This confirms a stable services-sector growth engine.
5. **Global production integration:** India operates as a globally connected creative production base. Indian teams contribute to international films, streaming content, advertising, and immersive media through integrated global workflows supported by a layered and scalable talent pool.

Issues with India's Creative Economy

1. **Financing and infrastructure gaps:** Enterprises struggle to access credit and face infrastructure limits that restrict scaling of operations. Limited capacity slows expansion.
2. **Weak intellectual property protection:** Enforcement gaps make it difficult to protect original work. Infringement risks reduce incentives for innovation and investment levels.
3. **Digital divide impact:** Rural and semi-urban regions lack high-speed internet and digital literacy needed for participation. This limits market reach and inclusion.
4. **Fragmented informal markets:** Many creative sectors lack formal recognition and remain unstructured. Traditional artisans receive low income and limited institutional support.
5. **Declining traditional craft continuity:** Younger generations avoid traditional art forms because income potential remains low. This threatens preservation of cultural heritage.
6. **Artificial intelligence challenges:** AI creates opportunities but raises concerns over copyright, privacy, and content monopolisation. Rapid technological change challenges regulatory and ethical frameworks.
7. **Operational barriers:** Bureaucratic procedures, lack of mentorship, and non-transparent financial support systems create uncertainty for creators. Recognition and assistance processes remain uneven.

Initiatives Taken to Promote the Creative Economy

1. **National AVGC-XR roadmap:** Policy supports talent development, intellectual property creation, industry collaboration, and global market access. The sector may generate nearly **20 lakh jobs** over the next decade.
2. **Indian Institute of Creative Technologies:** IICT functions as a National Centre of Excellence for AVGC-XR and gaming. It provides training, infrastructure, and industry collaboration linked globally.
3. **Regional creative clusters:** Hubs in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, and Thiruvananthapuram anchor growth. Emerging cities build new clusters that expand participation beyond major metropolitan centres.
4. **Event infrastructure systems:** Large venues and premium performance spaces support global touring circuits. Production companies, technicians, logistics teams, and hospitality services operate at international standards today.
5. **Orange Economy market platforms:** WAVES connects creators, startups, industry leaders, and policymakers for collaboration and deal-making. WaveX supports startup incubation, while WAVES Bazaar enables trade in scripts, music, and audiovisual rights.
6. **Creator discovery initiatives:** The Create in India Challenge identifies emerging talent and links them to international platforms. It enables local ideas to compete, collaborate, and commercialise globally.
7. **Education and skilling pipeline:** AVGC Content Creator Labs are proposed in **15,000 schools and 500 colleges** to build early skills. Demand may reach **nearly two million professionals by 2030**.

Conclusion

Conclusion: Creative industries now function as strategic economic infrastructure shaping employment, exports, and global cultural presence. India's expanding ecosystem shows strong market growth and institutional support. Continued investment in skills, platforms, and access will determine how effectively creativity becomes lasting economic strength and sustained global engagement in coming years and across emerging digital value chains future worldwide.

Question for practice:

Examine the role of creative industries as growth engines in India's economy, and assess the current status, and initiatives shaping the country's creative economy.

Source: PIB

A budgetary signal as banks cannot bear it all

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

Budget 2026 signals a limited but important shift in India's financial-sector reform approach. It reflects recognition that Indian banks are carrying risks that well-functioning markets usually absorb. Because corporate credit markets remain shallow, banks have become the main providers of long-term finance. This structural imbalance has steadily increased pressure on bank balance sheets and made the financial system more vulnerable. The proposed measures aim to redistribute risk through markets rather than concentrating it within banks.

Major Issue with India's Financial Architecture

1. **Structural imbalance between government and corporate bond markets:** Government securities outstanding are **close to 90% of GDP**, supported by a predictable issuance framework. **Corporate bonds remain only 15%–16% of GDP**, far smaller than in major economies.
2. **Banks as the default providers of long-term finance:** Long-term financing needs continue even when markets are weak. Banks step in because no alternative mechanism exists to absorb and distribute credit risk.
3. **High concentration of corporate debt in banks:** Banks carry **around 60%–65% of non-financial corporate debt,** compared **with 30% in the U.S. and 40% in Europe**. This reflects financial structure, not lending choice.
4. **Small size of the corporate bond market globally:** Corporate bonds are **less than 15% of GDP**, compared with **over 80% in the U.S., 55%–60% in Germany, and 45%–50% in China**.
5. **Limited market participation and weak liquidity:** Issuance is mainly through private placements, ownership is concentrated among institutional investors, and secondary market liquidity is weak.
6. **Restricted access and narrow investor base:** Households and foreign investors play only a marginal role. Issuance is heavily skewed toward top-rated firms.
7. **Overburdened bank balance sheets:** Banks bear risks that mature financial systems distribute across markets. This concentration increases systemic fragility.

Consequences of a Bank-Centric Financial System

1. **Severe maturity mismatch in bank financing:** Banks rely mainly on short-term deposits but fund infrastructure projects that take 15–20 years to generate returns.
2. **Higher vulnerability to economic shocks:** Extreme maturity transformation exposes banks to sudden stress when project outcomes or cash flows weaken.
3. **Direct absorption of project losses by banks:** When projects stall, losses accumulate immediately on bank balance sheets instead of being distributed across investors.
4. **Large fiscal cost of recapitalisation:** Since 2017, the government has injected over ₹3.2 lakh crore into public sector banks to stabilise the system.

5. **Transfer of private losses to public finances:** Recapitalisation shifts credit losses to the public balance sheet, creating a hidden fiscal burden.
6. **Opportunity cost in credit allocation:** Capital tied in long-term corporate loans reduces lending capacity for small firms, exporters, and first-time borrowers.
7. **Persistent constraints on SME credit:** Even after repeated clean-ups and capital injections, lending to small and medium enterprises remains limited.

Impact on Monetary Policy and Financial Stability

1. **Distorted transmission of interest-rate changes:** Banks burdened with long-term exposures are reluctant to pass on higher borrowing costs when policy rates rise.
2. **Restricted lending response during rate reductions:** Impaired balance sheets prevent banks from expanding credit fully when interest rates fall.
3. **Uneven adjustment of long-term borrowing costs:** Long-term interest rates do not respond smoothly to policy changes due to concentrated credit risk.
4. **Weak market-based repricing mechanisms:** Deep bond markets normally transmit policy signals through yield adjustments across maturities. This mechanism remains limited.
5. **Greater systemic fragility from risk concentration:** Heavy reliance on banks to absorb long-term risk increases financial system vulnerability.

Initiative Taken to Rebalance Risk

1. **Policy recognition of structural imbalance:** Budget 2026 acknowledges that banks are carrying risks that functioning markets should absorb.
2. **Market-making framework for corporate bonds:** The budget proposes mechanisms to improve liquidity and trading in corporate bond markets.
3. **Development of risk-transfer and hedging instruments:** Budget 2026 proposes total-return swaps and bond-index derivatives to help redistribute and manage credit risk.
4. **Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund:** The budget proposes partial credit guarantees to support infrastructure financing and reduce direct bank exposure.
5. **Recycling CPSE real estate through REITs:** Budget 2026 proposes dedicated REITs to monetise CPSE real estate and expand the supply of market-ready assets.
6. **Shift toward market-based allocation of risk:** These measures aim to move long-term credit risk from bank balance sheets to financial markets.

Conclusion

Budget 2026 signals clear recognition that banks cannot continue as the main absorbers of long-term credit risk. Structural imbalance, weak corporate bond markets, and concentrated exposures have increased fiscal costs and financial vulnerability. The proposed reforms aim to shift risk from banks to markets. **Sustained financial stability will depend on developing a deep corporate debt market that can price, distribute, and absorb long-term credit risk across a wider set of investors.**

Question for practice:

Discuss how Budget 2026 signals a shift in India's financial-sector approach by addressing the structural overdependence on banks and promoting market-based distribution of credit risk.

Source: The Hindu

Challenges faced by India's forest and vegetation cover

Source: The post **"Challenges faced by India's forest and vegetation cover"** has been created, based on **"What are the major challenges faced by India's forest and vegetation cover?"** published in **"Indian Express" on 18th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: India's forests are essential for biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and livelihood support for millions of people. However, several ecological and developmental pressures are threatening India's forest and vegetation cover.

Major Challenges Faced by India's Forests

A. Forest Fires

1. Forest fires have become frequent and intense due to climate change, dry weather, and accumulation of pine needles.
2. More than half of India's forests are vulnerable to fires, especially in Himalayan and central Indian regions.
3. Forest fires lead to biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and large-scale carbon emissions.

B. Invasive Alien Species

1. Invasive plants such as Lantana and Prosopis have spread widely in Indian forests.
2. These species outcompete native vegetation and reduce biodiversity.
3. They also degrade habitat quality in wildlife reserves.

C. Monoculture Plantations

1. Large-scale plantations of pine, eucalyptus, and teak have replaced natural forests in many regions.
2. Monoculture plantations support less biodiversity and store less carbon than natural forests.
3. They are also more prone to fires and pest attacks.

D. Diversion of Forest Land for Development

1. Large infrastructure projects such as roads, mines, dams, and industrial corridors require forest land diversion.
2. For example, the development project on Great Nicobar Island involves clearing large areas of tropical rainforest.
3. Such projects cause habitat destruction, displacement of tribal communities, and ecological imbalance.

E. Climate Change

1. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and prolonged droughts are weakening forest ecosystems.
2. Climate change increases pest outbreaks, forest fires, and species migration.

F. Governance and Policy Challenges

1. There are delays in updating forest policies and gaps in monitoring and enforcement.
2. Conflicts often arise between development needs and environmental conservation.
3. Compensatory afforestation is sometimes done in ecologically unsuitable areas.

How Forest Governance Addresses These Issues

A. Legal Framework

1. Forest laws regulate the diversion of forest land and promote conservation.
2. Wildlife protection laws help create national parks and sanctuaries.
3. Forest rights laws recognise the role of tribal communities in conservation.

B. Institutional Mechanisms

1. The National Green Tribunal reviews environmental clearances and resolves ecological disputes.
2. The Forest Survey of India monitors forest cover using satellite imagery.

C. Community Participation

1. Joint Forest Management programmes involve local communities in protecting forests.
2. Tribal rights recognition encourages sustainable use of forest resources.

D. Afforestation and Climate Initiatives

1. Government schemes such as Green India Mission promote afforestation.
2. India has committed to creating a large carbon sink by increasing forest cover.

Limitations of Current Governance

1. Compensatory afforestation cannot fully replace natural forests.
2. Enforcement of forest laws remains weak in many areas.

3. Development pressures often override ecological concerns.

Way Forward

1. India should promote mixed plantations with native species instead of monoculture forests.
2. Advanced fire warning systems and satellite monitoring should be strengthened.
3. Local communities should be empowered through better implementation of forest rights.
4. A balance must be maintained between development projects and environmental sustainability.

Conclusion: Protecting forests is essential for India's climate goals, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Strong governance, community participation, and scientific forest management are needed to address current challenges.

Question: Discuss the evolution of India's drone ecosystem and evaluate its role in transforming public service delivery. What policy measures have enabled its growth?

Source: Indian express

India's Drone Ecosystem

Source: The post **"India's Drone Ecosystem"** has been created, based on **"ndia's Drone Ecosystem"** published in **"PIB" on 18th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and technology

Context: Drone technology has become an important tool in governance because it provides accurate, real-time data that improves decision-making and monitoring. India has gradually built a structured drone ecosystem through supportive policies, training institutions, and digital regulation, which is helping integrate drones into development programmes and public administration.

Growth of India's Drone Ecosystem

1. India now has tens of thousands of registered drones and certified pilots, which shows that drone use is moving from experimental projects to mainstream governance applications.
2. A network of manufacturers, start-ups, software developers, training organisations, and regulatory bodies has emerged, creating an integrated ecosystem for production, services, and skill development.
3. Government support through incentives and simplified regulations has reduced entry barriers for entrepreneurs and encouraged innovation in drone-based services.

Transformation of Public Service Delivery

A. Land Mapping and Property Records

1. Drones are being used to map rural land accurately, which helps in creating digital property records and reducing land disputes.
2. The SVAMITVA programme has surveyed lakhs of villages, enabling villagers to obtain property cards that improve their access to bank credit and reduce litigation.
3. Drone-based mapping also supports better village planning and infrastructure development.

B. Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods

1. Drone technology is helping farmers adopt precision agriculture by spraying fertilisers and pesticides evenly and efficiently.
2. Schemes like Namo Drone Didi are empowering women Self-Help Groups by providing them drones and training, allowing them to earn income through farm services.
3. This approach reduces input costs, improves crop yield, and promotes rural entrepreneurship.

C. Infrastructure Monitoring

1. Drones are used to monitor highways, railways, bridges, and urban infrastructure, which helps detect faults and delays early.
2. The National Highways Authority of India uses drone footage to track construction progress and maintain digital records for accountability.
3. This improves transparency, reduces corruption, and speeds up project completion.

D. Disaster Management

1. Drones help authorities assess damage quickly during floods, landslides, earthquakes, and forest fires.
2. Organisations such as North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach deploy drones to send real-time visuals from disaster zones, improving rescue coordination.
3. They are also used to deliver medicines and relief materials in remote areas.

E. Defence and Security

1. Drones support surveillance along borders and sensitive locations, reducing risk to soldiers.
2. They provide intelligence gathering, target tracking, and precision strike capability.
3. Drone technology is also used for crowd management and monitoring critical infrastructure.

Policy Measures Enabling Drone Ecosystem

A. Liberalised Regulations

1. The Drone Rules simplified approval procedures, reduced paperwork, and allowed drones to operate in large parts of airspace.
2. Remote Pilot Certificates replaced traditional pilot licences, making it easier for citizens to become certified operators.
3. These reforms encouraged start-ups, farmers, and service providers to adopt drone technology.

B. Digital Governance Platforms

1. Digital platforms enable online registration of drones, pilot certification, and airspace permission, which ensures transparency and compliance.
2. Integration of drone services with e-governance systems has streamlined monitoring and improved regulatory oversight.
3. Such digital tools reduce bureaucratic delays and improve ease of doing business.

C. Financial Incentives

1. The Production Linked Incentive scheme promotes domestic drone manufacturing and reduces dependence on imports.
2. Reduction of GST rates on drones has lowered costs and encouraged wider adoption in agriculture and industry.
3. Innovation grants and expos help start-ups showcase indigenous drone technologies.

D. Skill Development Initiatives

1. Training institutes approved by regulators are increasing the number of certified drone pilots.
2. Capacity-building programmes train youth, engineers, and entrepreneurs in drone operations and maintenance.
3. These initiatives create employment opportunities and support a skilled workforce for the drone sector.

Benefits of India's Drone Ecosystem

1. Drones improve efficiency by reducing manual labour and increasing accuracy in surveys and inspections.
2. They enhance transparency and accountability in infrastructure projects and land records.
3. They create new jobs in manufacturing, services, and training sectors.
4. They improve disaster preparedness and national security capabilities.

Challenges in Drone Ecosystem

1. High initial cost of drones and maintenance limits adoption among small farmers and rural entrepreneurs.
2. Privacy concerns arise because drones collect sensitive data and images.
3. Dependence on imported components like sensors and chips weakens self-reliance.

Way Forward

1. India should promote indigenous manufacturing of drone components through research funding and industrial partnerships.

2. Training programmes should be expanded in rural areas to create more skilled pilots and technicians.
3. Strong data protection and privacy laws should regulate drone usage responsibly.
4. Integration of drones with AI, GIS, and satellite technology should be encouraged for better governance outcomes.

Conclusion: India's drone ecosystem demonstrates how technology, policy reforms, and innovation can transform public service delivery. With continued investment, skill development, and responsible regulation, drones can contribute significantly to agricultural growth, infrastructure monitoring, disaster management, and national security.

Question: Discuss the evolution of India's drone ecosystem and evaluate its role in transforming public service delivery. What policy measures have enabled its growth?

Source: PIB

The new world disorder, from rules to might

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2 - International Relation

Introduction

The new world disorder, from rules to might reflects a global shift from restraint to raw power. The post-war system promised that law would guide states and institutions would prevent domination. Today that confidence is weakening. Sovereignty is questioned, cooperation is shrinking, and global stability depends less on rules and more on strength. The world now stands in a fragile transitional phase between an eroding order and an uncertain future.

Foundations of the Rule-Based International Order

1. **Post-war vision of restraint:** The system created in 1945 assumed that **law could restrain power** and institutions could discipline states.
2. **Sovereign equality principle:** Sovereignty was treated as a right inherent in all nations, not a privilege granted by the strong.
3. **Role of the United Nations:** It was meant to help countries **settle differences peacefully** and prevent spheres of influence and predatory might.
4. **Expectation of self-restraint:** Powerful nations were expected to deny themselves the freedom to act only for narrow advantage if peace was to survive.
5. **Moral commitment to cooperation:** Global stability depended on shared responsibility and willingness to accept limits on national power for collective security.

The Return of Power Politics and Erosion of Norms

1. **Decline of binding rules:** International law increasingly appears optional, used when convenient and ignored when costly.
2. **Shift from hypocrisy to indifference:** Earlier violations still recognised norms, but now power openly disregards them without concern.
3. **Sovereignty becomes negotiable:** When major powers question territorial rights, others see that **force can override legal status**.
4. **Cascade effect of precedent:** Disregard for one country's sovereignty encourages others to reinterpret disputes as historical corrections or strategic necessities.
5. **Cost-based aggression logic:** The key question is no longer legality but whether the target is strong enough to raise costs.
6. **Risk of dispersed conflicts:** Weakening guardrails may produce many smaller wars that individually stay limited but collectively erode peace.
7. **Retreat from multilateral cooperation:** Withdrawal from organisations and agreements shows deep scepticism about shared governance.

8. **Global problems without borders:** Pandemics, climate change, cyber threats, and financial contagion cannot be solved by unilateral action.
9. **Power vacuum and influence shift:** When collective leadership weakens, other actors step in to shape institutions, norms, and standards.
10. **Fragmentation of governance structures:** Competing visions and reduced cooperation break unified global management into separate spheres.
11. **Fluid geopolitical environment:** Alliances blur, certainties fade, and countries struggle to define stable positions.
12. **Historical grievances persist:** Past conflicts and unresolved injustices continue to shape distrust and complicate peace efforts.
13. **Fear of global war as past stabiliser:** The threat of total conflict once restrained escalation and discouraged major confrontation.
14. **Small wars as cumulative danger:** Many limited conflicts together can slowly weaken the foundations of peace.

Structural Weakness and Legitimacy Crisis of Global Institutions

1. **Inequality in institutional design:** Post-war bodies reflected existing power hierarchies, concentrating authority in a few states.
2. **Guardians and rule-breakers paradox:** Those tasked with maintaining order also possess the greatest capacity to disrupt it.
3. **Authority without balanced responsibility:** Power is concentrated, but obligations are widely shared, creating structural imbalance.
4. **Selective application of rules:** When powerful states obey or ignore law as convenient, legitimacy declines.
5. **Dependence on political will:** Legal mandates exist, yet without good faith they remain largely aspirational.
6. **Erosion of credibility:** Institutions lose authority when enforcement appears inconsistent or partial.
7. **Peace requires trust:** Rules alone cannot sustain order without genuine commitment from major powers.
8. **Resource and legitimacy starvation:** Multilateral bodies lose strength when support and trust decline.
9. **Good faith deficit in enforcement:** Peace cannot be maintained when states lack sincere commitment.

Systemic Decline of the Liberal International Order and the Emerging Interregnum

1. **Patchwork nature of the order:** It combined norms, institutions, and habits of cooperation rather than a single unified system.
2. **Core principles under strain:** Sovereign equality, non-aggression, collective security, open trade, human rights, and cooperation face repeated violations.
3. **Paralysis of collective security:** Decision-making is blocked by vetoes and competing interests.
4. **Weaponisation of economic and political tools:** Trade and rights narratives become instruments of strategic pressure.
5. **Shrinking belief in shared order:** The system survived because states feared worse alternatives, but that belief is weakening.
6. **Persistence despite erosion:** Courts still function, peacekeepers deploy, and trade depends on predictable rules.
7. **Middle powers sustain engagement:** Europe, India, South Africa, Canada, and Brazil support multilateralism to avoid domination by stronger states.

8. **Future uncertainty of replacement:** Possibilities include new power-centred systems, competing blocs, issue-based coalitions, or unmediated anarchy.
9. **Interregnum condition of transition:** The old order fades while the new one remains undefined.
10. **Order survives by minimum function:** It prevents collapse even when expectations fall sharply.

Conclusion

The rule-based order has weakened but still prevents complete collapse. Power increasingly shapes rules, and institutions struggle without trust. The world stands in a prolonged transition where decay is gradual yet dangerous. The central challenge is preventing a future where power dominates law completely and global politics moves toward disorder without effective restraints.

Question for practice:

Examine how the weakening of the rule-based international order has led to the resurgence of power politics and created a transitional phase of global uncertainty.

Source: The Hindu

Circular Economy in Agriculture: Waste to Wealth

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

Agricultural waste is emerging as a major environmental and economic challenge, especially in agriculture-dependent economies like India. Large quantities of crop residues, food losses, and biodegradable waste create pollution while remaining underutilised resources. The circular economy approach promotes converting waste into energy, organic inputs, and valuable materials. By transforming waste into wealth, circular agriculture offers a practical pathway to improve resource efficiency, environmental sustainability, and long-term agricultural resilience.

Understanding Circular Economy in Agriculture

1. **Waste to wealth approach:** Circular economy treats waste as a valuable resource instead of an environmental burden or economic liability.
2. **Systemic transformation of production and consumption:** Circular economy redesigns material flows to recover, reuse, and reintegrate value across product life cycles to improve resource efficiency.
3. **Six Rs principles:** Circular economy follows Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refurbish, Recover, and Repair to keep materials in productive use for longer periods.
4. **True recycling concept:** Circular systems convert waste back to its original form without quality loss, enabling higher value recovery.
5. **Nature inspired sustainability model:** Circular economy draws inspiration from regenerative natural systems that use resources efficiently and generate minimal waste.

Sources and Types of Agricultural Waste in Circular Economy

1. **Farm to food plate waste chain:** Agricultural waste is generated at every stage, including cultivation, livestock rearing, processing, and consumption.
2. **Crop residues and stubble:** Post-harvest biomass such as straw, stalks, and husk forms a major share of agricultural waste, though a part is reused while some is burned.
3. **Biomass as a waste resource category:** Biomass includes organic material from plants and animals that forms an important component of agricultural waste streams.
4. **Animal manure, byproducts, and carcasses:** Livestock farming generates large quantities of dung, bedding waste, and animal remains, forming a major category of agricultural waste.
5. **Post-harvest losses:** Losses during storage, transport, and handling reduce both quantity and quality of agricultural produce.
6. **Food waste at consumption stage:** Edible food discarded at markets, retail outlets, and households forms a major waste stream in the agricultural value chain.

Importance of Circular Economy in Agriculture in India

1. **Environmental pollution reduction:** Proper waste management prevents methane emissions, air contamination, groundwater pollution, and environmental degradation.
2. **Magnitude of agricultural waste challenge:** India generates about **350 million tonnes annually**, making efficient management essential for resource recovery and environmental protection.
3. **Renewable energy generation potential:** Agricultural residues can generate more than **18,000 MW of power annually**, showing strong energy recovery opportunities.
4. **Soil health improvement:** Residue-based organic fertilisers enhance nutrient quality and reduce dependence on chemical inputs.
5. **Climate change mitigation need:** Organic waste decomposition in landfills releases greenhouse gases, making circular utilisation essential for emission reduction.
6. **Economic growth and employment potential:** Circular economy may reach **$2 trillion market value** and create **10 million jobs by 2050**.
7. **Global food waste burden:** Around **1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted annually worldwide**, highlighting the need for efficient resource use and recovery systems.
8. **Household waste contribution:** Nearly **one-third of biodegradable municipal waste originates from household kitchens**, increasing pressure on waste management systems.
9. **Landfill environmental impact:** Improper decomposition of organic waste releases methane, pollutes groundwater, and produces harmful odours.

Government Initiatives Promoting Circular Economy in Agriculture

1. GOBARdhan

- It is a multi-ministerial programme to convert cattle dung, crop residues, and food waste into compressed biogas and organic manure.
- It promotes waste-to-wealth by turning organic waste into clean energy and soil nutrients.
- Unified GOBARdhan portal improves monitoring and coordination. Carbon credit inclusion, tax relief, and simplified fertiliser norms support adoption.
- **Implementation progress:** Covers **51.4% of India's districts** with **979 operational biogas plants by January 2026**.

2. Crop Residue Management (CRM)

- It is a national initiative to manage crop residues through in-situ soil incorporation and ex-situ collection for composting, biogas, and bioenergy.
- It reduces stubble burning, improves soil health, and supports productive use of agricultural biomass.
- Custom Hiring Centres provide residue management machinery to farmers for effective implementation.
- **Implementation progress: Rs 3,926.16 crore released (2018–19 to 2025–26)** with over **42,000 Custom Hiring Centres established** and **3.24 lakh machines supplied**.

3. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)

- It is a financing facility providing medium to long-term institutional credit for post-harvest infrastructure and farm-level assets.
- The fund supports the establishment of warehouses, cold storage facilities, sorting and grading units, processing centres, and community farm assets to strengthen post-harvest management.
- **Implementation progress: Rs 66,310 crore sanctioned across 1,13,419 projects**, mobilising **Rs 1,07,502 crore investment**, including **545 organic input projects worth Rs 850 crore**.

4. Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

- It is a financial support programme to strengthen infrastructure across the livestock value chain.
- Under the fund, Multi-State Cooperative Societies promote organic manure production, biogas generation, and scientific management of animal by-products to ensure sustainable waste utilisation.
- **Implementation progress:** Launched with a **Rs 15,000 crore corpus** under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

5. Jal Shakti Initiatives

- They are programmes promoting wastewater treatment, reuse, and water conservation for sustainable agriculture and resource efficiency.
- They improve irrigation water availability, reduce groundwater pressure, and support sustainable water management.
- **Implementation progress:** Jal Jeevan Mission provides **55 litres per capita per day** functional household tap water supply in rural areas.

Circular Economy in Agriculture and Sustainable Development Goals

1. **Support for SDG 2:** Circular agriculture supports SDG 2 by promoting sustainable farming systems that improve nutrition and strengthen food security.
2. **Resilient farming systems:** Composting, biomass recycling, and biochar improve soil fertility and reduce dependence on chemical inputs, supporting sustainable and resilient agriculture.
3. **Global food waste reduction:** Circular practices help reduce **1.05 billion tonnes of food waste generated in 2022**, including **60% from households**, improving resource efficiency and sustainability.

Conclusion

India's transition towards circular agriculture shows that waste can become a productive resource rather than an environmental burden. Converting agricultural waste into energy, organic fertilisers, and reusable resources strengthens soil health, resource efficiency, and farm resilience. Continued policy support, infrastructure expansion, and coordinated implementation can scale waste-to-wealth systems, ensuring long-term food security, climate resilience, and sustainable rural development.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the circular economy in agriculture can transform waste into valuable resources while promoting environmental sustainability, economic growth, and resource efficiency in India.

Source: PIB

India's moment to restoring balance to copyright

Source: The post **"India's moment to restoring balance to copyright"** has been created, based on **"India's moment to restoring balance to copyright"** published in **"The Hindu" on 19th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and technology

Context: Copyright law was originally designed to balance incentives for creators with access to knowledge for society. Over time, copyright protection has expanded excessively and has begun to obstruct accessibility, creativity, and AI innovation. India's present framework under the Copyright Act, 1957 requires reforms to meet the needs of the digital and AI age.

Background & Historical Context

- Modern copyright law began with the Statute of Anne, which provided authors a limited monopoly of 14 years.
- Earlier copyright laws required registration and deposit of copies for public libraries, which ensured public benefit.
- Today, copyright protection is automatic, lasts for the life of the author plus 70 years, and applies even to trivial works like social media posts.
- This expansion has reduced the size of the public domain and restricted knowledge access.

Key Issues with Rigid Copyright Laws

1. Accessibility Barriers

- Rigid copyright laws can deny access to knowledge for persons with disabilities.
- Visually impaired persons were earlier unable to legally obtain accessible books across borders.

- The Marrakesh Treaty was created after global advocacy to allow accessible-format sharing.
- This shows that copyright law sometimes restricts even basic rights like the right to read.

2. Hindrance to AI Development

- Artificial Intelligence systems require large datasets, including copyrighted material, for training.
- India's current law does not clearly permit text-and-data mining for AI training.
- Countries like Japan, Singapore, and the European Union have introduced exceptions for such uses.
- Legal uncertainty discourages AI startups, research institutions, and innovation.

3. Blocking Technological Progress

- Web search engines must copy webpages temporarily to index and provide results.
- Strict copyright rules make such essential technological processes legally risky.
- Copyright laws have also been used to block assistive technologies like text-to-speech features.
- Such barriers slow digital innovation and reduce public welfare.

4. Over-Expansion of Copyright

- Copyright protection now lasts for very long periods, which delays works entering the public domain.
- Automatic copyright applies even to non-commercial or low-value works.
- Copyright law is increasingly used to protect existing jobs rather than promote creativity.
- This contradicts the original purpose of copyright.

Implications for India

1. India's AI sector may lag behind global competitors due to legal uncertainty.
2. Students, researchers, and disabled persons may face barriers to accessing knowledge.
3. Artists and creators may struggle because creativity depends on learning from previous works.
4. India's digital economy and innovation ecosystem may weaken.

Way Forward

1. Introduce Flexible Fair Use

- India should adopt a broad and flexible fair-use clause similar to the United States and Singapore.
- Such flexibility will allow law to adapt to new technologies.

2. Create Text & Data Mining Exceptions

- India should explicitly allow AI training on copyrighted material for non-consumptive purposes.
- Machine analysis should be treated differently from human reading or viewing.

3. Strengthen Accessibility Rights

- India should fully implement accessible-format exceptions and support disability-friendly publishing.
- This will ensure equal access to education.

4. Promote Knowledge Commons

- The government should fund open-source datasets and AI models for public use.
- Safe harbour provisions should protect such datasets from copyright claims.

5. Revisit Copyright Duration

- India should reconsider extremely long copyright terms.
- Shorter protection will expand the public domain and encourage innovation.

6. Support Creators through Other Means

- Governments can provide grants, fellowships, and cooperative models for artists.
- Taxes on large AI companies can fund cultural development programs.

Conclusion: Copyright law must restore its balance between protecting creators and serving the public good. Reforming the Copyright Act, 1957 will improve accessibility, promote AI innovation, and strengthen India's knowledge economy. India has an opportunity to lead globally by modernizing copyright for the 21st century.

Question: Rigid copyright regimes can undermine access to knowledge, creativity, and technological innovation. Discuss in the context of Artificial Intelligence and India's copyright framework. Suggest reforms.

Source: The Hindu

Great Nicobar project

Source: The post **"Great Nicobar project"** has been created, based on **"As NGT clears Great Nicobar project, a look at its strategic importance and ecological fallout"** published in **"Indian Express" on 19th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: The **Great Nicobar Island Development Project** is a mega infrastructure initiative worth about ₹72,000–81,000 crore that aims to transform **Great Nicobar Island** into an economic, logistics, and defence hub. The project is being implemented by **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd** as part of India's long-term Indo-Pacific strategy. The project represents a major example of the development versus environment debate in India.

About the Great Nicobar Island Development Project

- The project covers around 16,610 hectares of land located in the southern part of Great Nicobar Island near **Indira Point**, which is India's southernmost tip.
- The project seeks to utilise the island's proximity to the **Malacca Strait**, one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world.

Key Components

- An International Container Transshipment Terminal will be built at **Galathea Bay** to handle global cargo traffic and reduce India's dependence on foreign ports such as **Singapore** and **Colombo**.
- A greenfield international airport will be constructed to improve civilian connectivity and enable strategic military operations.
- Two greenfield cities and an integrated township will be created to accommodate a projected population increase to nearly 6.5 lakh people by 2050.
- A coastal mass rapid transport system will be developed to connect major infrastructure nodes across the island.
- A free trade zone and cruise tourism terminal will be established to attract investment and boost tourism revenue.
- A ship-breaking yard and gas-solar hybrid power plant will be set up to support industrial and energy needs.

Geography of Great Nicobar Island

- Great Nicobar Island is part of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**, which consists of more than 600 islands located in the Bay of Bengal.
- The island has dense tropical rainforests, mangroves, coral reefs, and hilly terrain, and it receives nearly 3,500 mm of rainfall annually.
- A large portion of the island lies within the **Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve**, which hosts unique ecosystems.
- The island is home to endangered species such as leatherback turtles, Nicobar megapodes, and Nicobar crab-eating macaques.

Strategic Significance of the Project

1. Geo-Strategic Importance

- The island's location near the Malacca Strait allows India to monitor global maritime trade routes and enhance its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Strengthening infrastructure on the island will improve India's maritime domain awareness and ensure security of sea lanes.

2. Geo-Security Importance

- The project complements defence facilities such as **INS Baaz** and the tri-services command at **Port Blair**.

- It will help India counter strategic expansion by **China** in the Indian Ocean Region.

3. Economic Importance

- The ICTT will help India become a major cargo transshipment hub and save foreign exchange currently spent on foreign ports.
- The free trade zone will encourage export-oriented industries and increase foreign investment.
- The project may support India's Blue Economy through shipping, fisheries, and tourism development.

4. Employment and Tourism

- Large infrastructure projects will create direct employment in construction, logistics, and services sectors.
- Cruise tourism and improved connectivity will promote eco-tourism and increase local incomes.

5. Social Development

- The project promises better hospitals, schools, digital connectivity, and transport infrastructure.
- Improved infrastructure will enhance living standards in remote island regions.

Concerns Associated with the Project

1. Threat to Biodiversity

- Nearly one million trees may be cut, which could destroy fragile rainforest ecosystems.
- Construction near Galathea Bay may damage nesting sites of leatherback turtles and other endemic species.

2. Impact on Indigenous Tribes

- The project threatens the traditional lands of Shompen and Nicobarese tribes.
- Exposure to outsiders may lead to disease spread and cultural disruption.
- The project may conflict with provisions of the **Forest Rights Act 2006**, which protects tribal land rights.

3. Seismic and Tsunami Risk

- The island lies in a high seismic zone that was affected by the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**.
- Large infrastructure projects may be vulnerable to earthquakes and rising sea levels.

4**. Lack of Adequate Consultation**

- Tribal councils and environmental experts have argued that consultation processes were insufficient.
- Reports related to environmental clearance were criticised for lack of transparency.

5. Economic Viability Concerns

- The island's remote location and lack of hinterland connectivity may limit trade potential.
- Competing with established transshipment hubs such as Singapore or Colombo may be difficult.
- India already has projects like **Vizhinjam International Seaport**, which may reduce the need for another transshipment hub.

6. Social Impact

- Rapid population growth may lead to displacement of local communities and cultural erosion.
- Increased urbanisation may strain water, land, and waste-management systems.

Way Forward

1. Protect Tribal Rights

- Development should follow the principle of free, prior, and informed consent for tribal communities.
- Tribal welfare policies must be implemented strictly.

2. Separate Defence and Commercial Infrastructure

- Defence infrastructure can be built with minimal ecological damage.
- Large-scale commercial townships should be reconsidered.

3. Reassess Economic Feasibility

- Independent cost-benefit studies should evaluate long-term profitability.
- Phased development can reduce financial and ecological risks.

4. Conduct Robust Environmental Assessments

- Comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments must be mandatory.
- Transparent reporting and public consultation should be ensured.

5. Promote Eco-Friendly Infrastructure

- Green buildings, renewable energy, and wildlife protection measures should be adopted.
- Critical habitats like turtle nesting beaches should be protected.

6. Explore Alternative Development Models

- Development could be distributed across multiple islands instead of concentrating on one island.
- Eco-tourism and marine research could be prioritised over heavy industry.

Conclusion: The Great Nicobar Project has significant strategic and economic benefits for India's maritime future. However, ecological damage, tribal displacement, and seismic risks could have irreversible consequences. India must pursue sustainable island development by balancing national security, economic growth, environmental protection, and tribal rights.

Question: What is the Great Nicobar Island Development Project? Examine its strategic significance, ecological concerns, and suggest a balanced way forward.
Source: IndianExpress

India's 'Third Way' for AI Governance

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Introduction

India is hosting the AI Impact Summit at a time when the world is unsure how to govern artificial intelligence. Countries are struggling to balance innovation with risks that are both known and uncertain. India proposes a **"Third Way"** that supports development while recognising limits of existing global models. This approach aims to suit countries whose economic and institutional realities differ from major AI powers.

The Global AI Governance Landscape

1. **Competing governance models:** The world follows three major approaches — **the European Union's compliance-heavy regime, the United States' hands-off market model, and China's centralised state control.** Each reflects different policy traditions.
2. **Limited transferability to other countries:** These governance systems were built for specific policy traditions. They do not easily fit the needs of countries outside major AI powers.
3. **Global uncertainty over the right balance:** There is confusion about how to promote innovation while managing risks. No single model has emerged as universally suitable.

India's Distinct AI Governance Approach

1. **Governance beyond regulation:** India's framework covers **adoption, diffusion, diplomacy, and capacity building**along with risk management, showing a broader governance vision. For e **xample — National AI governance guidelines (November 2025)** go beyond regulation and focus on scaling AI responsibly across sectors.
2. **Inclusive development as priority:** AI is meant to scale across **healthcare, agriculture, education, and public administration** to support broad social and economic development.
3. **Working through existing legal structures:** The framework does not create separate AI legislation. It uses current laws while remaining flexible and forward-looking.
4. **Agile and evolving policy design:** High-level principles are converted into practical guidelines. The framework can change as technology develops.

5. **Early implementation through regulatory action:** Amendments to IT rules (February 10) require **labelling of AI-generated content and a three-hour takedown window for harmful material.** This is the first government mandate for AI-generation disclosure.

Concern Related to India's Distinct AI Governance Approach

1. **Worker protection gap in rapid AI expansion:** Accelerating adoption without labour safeguards risks displacement and inequality, creating an unbalanced governance model.
2. **Insufficient minimum standards for accountability:** Clear requirements for transparency and responsibility of AI developers are not fully established.
3. **Weak institutional protection for vulnerable groups:** Mechanisms to safeguard whistleblowers and affected populations require stronger policy attention.
4. **Limited public awareness and participation:** Citizens need better understanding of AI risks and greater agency in governance processes.
5. **Incomplete people-centred governance structure:** Innovation expansion is not fully matched with social protection systems for those affected by technological change.
6. **Risk of coordination without safeguards:** Governance cooperation among countries may remain ineffective if social protections and accountability measures are not clearly defined.

Significance for the Global South and Middle Powers

1. **Unequal global AI investment landscape:** AI funding is concentrated among a few private actors in the Global North. This creates uneven access and influence.
2. **Dependence on external AI systems creates risks:** Reliance on proprietary technologies introduces new context-specific vulnerabilities and limits domestic control.
3. **Alternative governance pathway for developing economies:** India promotes **strategic autonomy, localised governance design, and strong public-private partnerships** suited to domestic needs.
4. **Need for shared research and safety infrastructure:** Middle powers require collaborative evaluation frameworks, joint research networks, and mechanisms to pool expertise on risks that no single country can assess alone.
5. **India's capacity to lead coordination efforts:** Its size, scale, and leading role in AI infrastructure, combined with historic success in digital development and access expansion, position it to convene collective governance.

Way Forward

1. **Expanding infrastructure and compute access:** Empowering national initiatives can widen AI adoption and reduce entry barriers for diverse users.
2. **Improving data governance and sharing systems:** Strong data governance and portability standards can support responsible innovation and accessibility.
3. **Promoting locally relevant datasets:** Developing culturally representative datasets enables inclusive and context-sensitive AI models.
4. **Ensuring evaluation datasets and compute availability:** Access to testing infrastructure supports safe deployment and continuous safety assessment.
5. **Integrating AI with digital public infrastructure:** Linking AI with existing systems allows scalable and inclusive technology delivery across sectors.
6. **Need for international coordination:** Effective enforcement against global technology firms requires cross-border regulatory cooperation.

Conclusion

India's "Third Way" seeks to balance innovation, strategic autonomy, and inclusive development while offering an alternative to dominant global models. Yet important gaps remain in worker protection, accountability, and

public safeguards. The coming year will test whether India can align innovation with human welfare. Its choices will shape whether this governance model becomes globally influential.

For detailed information on **India's AI Guidelines for Tech Regulation** read this article here

Question for practice:

Examine how India's "Third Way" for AI governance differs from existing global governance models and evaluate its significance and challenges for developing countries and middle powers.

Source: The Hindu

India and France upgrade ties to Special Global Strategic Partnership

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

Introduction

India and France upgraded their relationship to a **Special Global Strategic Partnership** during President Emmanuel Macron's official visit to India in February 2026. The decision reflects the deepening and widening of bilateral cooperation across defence, technology, economy and global governance. It signals a long-term strategic alignment between the two countries to jointly address global uncertainty, strengthen institutional cooperation, and expand collaboration across emerging sectors while supporting stability and a rules-based international order.

Evolution of India–France Bilateral Relations

1. **Strategic partnership foundation since 1998:** India and France established a strategic partnership in **1998**, creating structured cooperation in defence, technology, diplomacy and economic engagement.
2. **Long-term roadmap guiding cooperation:** Both countries adopted the **Horizon 2047 Roadmap**, setting direction for cooperation up to India's independence centenary and the centenary of diplomatic relations.
3. **High-level leadership engagement continuity:** President Macron's 2026 visit followed Prime Minister Modi's 2025 visit to France, showing sustained political coordination at the highest level.
4. **Expansion beyond traditional defence focus:** Cooperation gradually expanded from defence to civil nuclear energy, space, artificial intelligence, research, health, education and cultural exchange.
5. **Institutional dialogue and review mechanisms:** An **annual Foreign Ministers Comprehensive Dialogue** was created to review progress and implement long-term partnership goals.

Vision and Purpose of the New Partnership

1. **Response to global uncertainty:** The upgraded partnership aims to jointly address geopolitical instability, economic disruption and changing international power dynamics.
2. **Force for global stability and progress:** Both countries see the partnership as supporting prosperity, resilience and a stable rules-based international order.
3. **Strengthening strategic autonomy:** Cooperation aims to reinforce sovereign decision-making in defence, technology and economic policy.
4. **Collective management of global challenges:** Both sides intend to work together on economic security, technological change, climate risks and international conflicts.
5. **Future-oriented cooperation framework:** The partnership focuses on innovation, digital technologies, health, sustainability and advanced research.
6. **Structured implementation commitment:** Institutional review mechanisms ensure continuous monitoring, coordination and long-term policy execution.

Core Pillars of Bilateral Relations

1. Defence and security

- **Deep and long-standing defence cooperation:** France remains one of India's foremost defence partners, focusing on joint design, development and production of advanced military systems.
- **Joint manufacturing expansion:** The **H125 helicopter final assembly line in Karnataka** will produce high-altitude aircraft capable of reaching Mount Everest and exporting globally.
- **Major defence procurement and platform collaboration:** Cooperation includes Rafale fighter jets, submarines, jet engines and helicopter development, strengthening India's defence capacity.
- **Missile production partnership:** A joint venture between **Bharat Electronics Limited and Safran** will produce HAMMER air-to-surface weapons in India.
- **Military operational coordination:** Reciprocal deployment of officers and joint exercises such as Varuna, Shakti and Garuda enhance interoperability.
- **Counter-terrorism cooperation commitment:** Both countries condemn terrorism and coordinate intelligence, financial monitoring and security cooperation through international mechanisms.

2. Technology and innovation

- **Institutional platforms for future technologies:** Launch of the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health, Centre for Digital Sciences and Technology and Innovation Network strengthens long-term research and innovation collaboration.
- **Co-development of critical and emerging technologies:** A Joint Advanced Technology Development Group will promote joint work in advanced and strategic technologies, including defence-related applications.
- **Responsible artificial intelligence and scientific research cooperation:** Both countries support secure and trustworthy AI and aim to bridge the global AI divide. Agreements between research institutions expand collaboration in advanced materials, applied mathematics and digital technologies.

3. Economic cooperation

- **Trade and investment strengthening:** Business partnerships expand across aerospace, logistics, energy, telecommunications and technology sectors.
- **Taxation reform to support investment:** Amendment of the bilateral tax treaty prevents double taxation and encourages cross-border economic activity.
- **Digital payments connectivity expansion:** France became the first European country to offer **UPI**, improving transactions and tourism convenience.
- **Industrial and infrastructure collaboration:** Cooperation covers railways, high-speed transport, hydrogen trains and aeronautics manufacturing, strengthening skills and production.

4. Climate and energy

- **Commitment to Paris Agreement goals:** Both countries support limiting temperature rise below 2°C and pursuing 1.5°C targets.
- **Renewable energy and sustainability initiatives:** Cooperation includes solar energy, green finance, disaster resilience and sustainable development programmes.
- **Civil nuclear energy collaboration expansion:** Partnership covers large nuclear plants, **Small Modular Reactors and Advanced Modular Reactors**, supporting low-carbon transition and energy security.
- **Ocean and biodiversity governance:** Both support marine protection, high seas treaty implementation and expansion of global marine protected areas.
- **Global climate institutions engagement:** Joint work through the International Solar Alliance and Disaster Resilient Infrastructure strengthens climate cooperation.

5. Global governance

- **Commitment to rules-based international order:** Both countries support international law, free trade and multilateral cooperation.

- **UN reform and diplomatic coordination:** France supports India's permanent membership in the **UN Security Council**, while both coordinate positions on global conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy.
- **Regional and multilateral cooperation:** Collaboration extends to the Indo-Pacific and broader economic partnerships to support stability and resilient supply chains.

6. People-to-people ties

- **Education, research and mobility expansion:** Both aim to host **30,000 Indian students in France by 2030** while expanding academic and research cooperation.
- **Health, skills and professional exchange:** Joint work in healthcare research, vocational training and migration partnerships supports workforce mobility and innovation.
- **Cultural and innovation linkages:** Cultural exchanges, language promotion and startup ecosystem collaboration strengthen long-term societal and entrepreneurial connections between both countries.

Significance and Strategic Implications

1. **Comprehensive partnership expansion:** The agreement produced **21 major outcomes** across defence, technology, innovation, health, energy and education.
2. **Strengthening industrial and technological capacity:** Joint manufacturing and research improve domestic production, workforce skills and technological competitiveness.
3. **Enhancing strategic autonomy and resilience:** Diversified supply chains, defence cooperation and innovation partnerships strengthen economic and policy independence.
4. **Institutionalising long-term cooperation:** Structured review mechanisms and roadmap planning ensure continuity and implementation across decades.
5. **Positioning both countries as global partners:** The partnership enhances their role in supporting stability and managing global challenges.

Conclusion

The Special Global Strategic Partnership represents a decisive transformation in India–France relations from sectoral cooperation to comprehensive long-term strategic alignment. Its institutional mechanisms, expanding sectoral depth and shared global outlook provide a stable framework for sustained collaboration. Effective implementation, continued political commitment and deeper integration across priority sectors will determine how far the partnership strengthens resilience, enhances strategic autonomy and contributes to stability in an increasingly uncertain international environment.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of the upgradation of India–France relations to a Special Global Strategic Partnership for bilateral cooperation and global strategic stability.

Source: Indian Express

AI in healthcare

Source: The post **"AI in healthcare"** has been created, based on **"People above platforms: AI in healthcare"** published in **"The Hindu" on 20th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and technology

Context: Artificial Intelligence is increasingly being used in healthcare for diagnostic imaging, data analysis, and hospital workflow management. However, discussions during consultations on people-led AI in health in Delhi highlight that AI must be evaluated through a rights-based public health approach rather than technological hype.

Potential Benefits of AI in Healthcare

1. AI has shown promise in radiology by improving accuracy in image recognition and early disease detection.

2. AI-based analytics can support doctors in diagnosis when used in controlled clinical settings.
3. AI tools can improve hospital workflow by assisting in record keeping, triage, and patient management.
4. AI can help strengthen preventive care by reminding patients about medication adherence and follow-up visits.

Limitations of AI in Healthcare

1. Healthcare involves ethical judgement, empathy, and social understanding, which AI cannot fully replicate.
2. Many AI tools that perform well in pilot studies often fail in real-world hospital settings.
3. AI systems are trained on limited datasets and may not reflect the diversity of Indian patients.
4. Healthcare requires trust and communication between doctors and patients, which algorithms cannot replace.

Need to Protect Patients' Rights

1. AI systems often collect large amounts of health data, raising concerns about who owns and controls the data.
2. Patients must have the right to understand AI-generated medical advice in simple language.
3. Health data should be processed locally wherever possible to avoid misuse and centralisation.
4. Patients must have the right to withdraw consent and control how their data is used in future.
5. AI systems must be tested for caste, gender, regional, and socio-economic bias to ensure equity.
6. Healthcare access should never be denied to patients who do not use AI-based systems.

AI Must Supplement Human Care

1. AI should assist doctors in decision-making rather than replacing them.
2. Medical decisions must remain with accountable healthcare professionals.
3. Health workers such as ASHAs and nurses should not face job loss due to AI automation.
4. Governments should conduct labour impact assessments before approving AI tools.
5. AI tools must enhance the dignity, skills, and working conditions of health workers.

Political Economy of AI

1. Many AI healthcare tools are developed by large private corporations aiming for profit.
2. Centralised data systems may lead to corporatisation of healthcare services.
3. Public data and public funds should be used to strengthen public health systems rather than private profits.
4. AI should not create an elite healthcare system accessible only to wealthy patients.

Structural Problems in India's Health System

1. India faces chronic underinvestment in public healthcare infrastructure.
2. There is a shortage of trained doctors, nurses, and health workers.
3. Private healthcare remains poorly regulated in many areas.
4. High out-of-pocket expenditure pushes many families into poverty.
5. These structural issues cannot be solved only through technological solutions like AI.

Way Forward

1. India must adopt a rights-based framework for AI in healthcare.
2. AI tools must be transparent, accountable, and regularly audited.
3. AI must be designed in regional languages to ensure accessibility.
4. Public investment should focus on strengthening primary healthcare.
5. Non-AI healthcare options must remain available for all patients.
6. AI must be used only as a support tool while keeping doctors and health workers at the centre of care.

Conclusion: Artificial Intelligence can improve efficiency in healthcare, but it cannot replace human care or solve structural health system problems. India must ensure that AI serves patients' rights, health equity, and public purpose while keeping health workers and public health systems at the centre of healthcare delivery.

Question: "Artificial Intelligence in healthcare must serve patients' rights, health equity, and public purpose while remaining supplementary to human care." Discuss in the context of India.

States' capex holds key to growth momentum

Source: The post **"States' capex holds key to growth momentum"** has been created, based on **"States' capex holds key to growth momentum"** published in **"Indian Exoress" on 20th February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

Context: After the Union Budget, State budgets provide a clearer picture of general government finances because States account for a major share of public spending in India. Analysis of 18 major States, which together contribute about 89% of India's GDP, shows that although revenue growth has been weaker than expected in 2025-26, States' capital expenditure is likely to grow significantly, which can support economic growth.

Current Trends in State Finances

1. Combined revenues of major States grew by only about 7.7%, which was far lower than the 22% growth projected in their budgets.
2. State GST collections grew by only around 3.3%, which limited revenue expansion.
3. Transfers and grants from the Union government were slightly lower than budget estimates, reducing fiscal space for States.
4. Because of modest revenue growth, States slowed their revenue expenditure growth to around 7%, which was much lower than budget projections.
5. However, capital expenditure grew strongly in the later part of the year, especially in the third quarter.

Importance of States' Capital Expenditure

1. Capital expenditure creates long-term productive assets such as roads, irrigation systems, hospitals, and schools.
2. Capital spending has a higher fiscal multiplier compared to revenue expenditure because it stimulates investment and employment.
3. States account for nearly two-thirds of public capital spending in India, making their investment decisions crucial for growth.
4. Increased State capex helps improve infrastructure, which boosts private investment and regional development.
5. Strong State capex can offset any slowdown in Union government capital spending.

Factors Supporting State Capex Growth

1. The Centre's 50-year interest-free capex loans to States have encouraged investment in infrastructure projects.
2. Improved fiscal discipline in revenue expenditure has allowed States to prioritise capital spending.
3. Continued spending momentum in the last quarter of the financial year could lead to 16-18% growth in State capex.
4. Higher excise duty collections and stamp duty revenues have provided some support to State finances.

Challenges Before States

1. Weak GST growth and lower-than-expected transfers from the Union government have constrained State revenues.
2. Rising welfare commitments and subsidies increase revenue expenditure pressure.
3. Many States face high debt levels, which limits borrowing capacity.
4. Regional disparities in fiscal capacity lead to uneven development.
5. Delays in project execution reduce the effectiveness of capital expenditure.

Way Forward

1. States must improve tax administration and expand GST compliance to increase revenues.
2. States should prioritise high-quality capital projects with strong economic returns.

3. Better coordination between the Centre and States can improve fund transfers and fiscal planning.
4. Public-private partnerships can help mobilise additional investment.
5. Fiscal responsibility laws should ensure sustainable borrowing while allowing productive capex.

Conclusion: States play a critical role in India's public investment strategy. Even when revenues are weak, maintaining strong capital expenditure can sustain economic momentum, create jobs, and improve infrastructure. Therefore, prudent fiscal management combined with higher quality capital spending by States is essential for India's long-term growth.

Question: "States' capital expenditure is crucial for sustaining India's economic growth momentum." Discuss in the context of recent trends in State finances.

India's Satirical Freedom and the Scope of State Power

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant
provisions and basic structure.

Introduction

India's public culture has long accepted satire as a way to question authority and expose social contradictions. Political humour, cartoons, and artistic exaggeration have traditionally existed within democratic tolerance. However, recent content blocking actions and expanded digital regulation have intensified debate over the limits of state power. The central question is whether satire can be legitimately treated as a threat under constitutional restrictions on free expression.

Recent Content Blocking and Expansion of State Regulatory Power

1. **Blocking of a satirical cartoon video:** Access to a 52 second cartoon video featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi was blocked from the social media handles of *The Wire*, after authorities said it spread unverified information affecting defence, national security, reputation, and foreign relations.

2. Institutional criticism of democratic shrinking: The Editors Guild described the action as evidence of **rising intolerance toward scrutiny, humour, and critical commentary**.

3. **Reduced compliance window under amended rules:** The **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026** mandate removal of illegal content within **three hours**, sharply reduced from earlier 24–36 hours.

4. **Automated enforcement through Sahyog portal:** The Sahyog platform enables authorities to issue notices to intermediaries for removing or disabling unlawful online information.

5. **Judicial validation of enforcement infrastructure:** The **Karnataka High Court (Sahyog portal case)** upheld the system despite claims it bypassed mandatory procedural safeguards.

Legal and Institutional Framework Governing Content Blocking

1. **Constitutional limits on blocking powers:** Under **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000**, content may be blocked only on grounds permitted by **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution.

2. **Procedural safeguards mandated by courts:** Reasons for blocking must be recorded in writing and remain subject to review by a designated committee.

3. **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):**
   - **Mandatory hearing requirement:** The Supreme Court ruled that both the intermediary and the original content creator must be heard before blocking is ordered.
   - **Restrictions tied strictly to constitutional grounds:** The same judgment clarified that blocking must relate to security, defence, foreign relations, public order, or incitement.

4. **Emergency blocking and limited notice (Rules 8 and 9 of the Blocking Rules, 2009) :** These provisions permit urgent blocking of online content, and informing the original creator of the information is not mandatory before action is taken.

5. **Confidentiality of blocking proceedings (Rule 16 of the Blocking Rules, 2009) :** The rule mandates confidentiality of blocking requests, complaints, and actions taken, limiting disclosure of the process and related information.

Constitutional and Judicial Understanding of Satire and Free Expression

1. **Meaning of satire in constitutional law:** The Supreme Court **(Indibily Creative (P) Ltd. v. State of West Bengal (2019) case)** defined satire as exaggeration that induces laughter while exposing social or political shortcomings.

2. Satire as powerful artistic communication: The same judgment recognised satire's **unique ability to reveal absurdities, hypocrisies, and contradictions clearly and quickly**.

3. **Danger of suppressing public debate —:** The Supreme Court (**D.C. Saxena v. Chief Justice of India (1997) case)** warned that restricting speech on public issues stifles debate and may destabilise society in the long run.

4. **Protection of artistic freedom through satire:** Judicial reasoning in **Indibily Creative (2019)** affirmed that artistic expression through satire counters oppression and promotes social understanding.

5. Nature of cartoons and caricature : The Court (**Kama v. M. Jothisorupan (Madras High Court, 2018)** case) described political cartoons as deliberate exaggerations and **"weapons of ridicule"** intended to sting, not flatter.

6. **Reasonable observer test applied by courts:** Satirical expression must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable person capable of humour, not a hypersensitive individual.

Democratic Acceptance and Social Function of Satire

1. **Democratic tolerance of ridicule:** Courts in democracies grant satire wide latitude as an essential element of public opinion and civic discourse.

2. **Historical acceptance of irreverent portrayal:** Even foundational national figures have historically been depicted in exaggerated or mocking ways without undermining democratic stability.

3. **Creative freedom in social representation :** The **Delhi High Court (Netflix streaming injunction plea)** affirmed that artists may portray society as they perceive it, including through satire.

4. **Social function of exaggeration:** Courts recognised that comedians and satirists highlight social flaws by exaggerating them until they become clearly visible.

5. **Judicial confidence in democratic resilience :**The Court **(March 2025 verdict in Imran Pratapgarhi case)** held that artistic expression, poetry, or entertainment cannot easily create communal hatred in a mature republic.

Ongoing Legal Challenges and Institutional Tensions

1. **Concerns about procedural fairness in blocking decisions:** Petitioners argue creators are sometimes not informed of proposed restrictions despite existing constitutional safeguards.

2. **Scrutiny of emergency blocking powers:** Critics contend urgent blocking provisions enable removal of content with limited opportunity for response.

3. **Transparency concerns arising from confidentiality rules:** Mandatory secrecy surrounding blocking processes is viewed as weakening public accountability.

4. **Legal resistance from digital media actors:** Technology organisations, journalists, and platform operators have approached courts against restrictions imposed on security or public order grounds.

5. **Continuing judicial engagement with digital regulation:** Courts are examining whether expanding enforcement tools remain consistent with constitutional protections of speech and due process.

Conclusion

India's constitutional order recognises satire as a core democratic safeguard, yet expanding digital regulation continues to test limits of state authority. Protecting expressive freedom requires strict adherence to procedural safeguards, transparency, and proportional use of power. Judicial oversight remains decisive in ensuring regulation strengthens governance without eroding democratic debate or public trust over time in the future.

Question for practice:

Discuss how recent content-blocking measures and expanding digital regulatory powers in India raise constitutional questions about the protection of satire and freedom of expression.

Source: The Hindu

India's Youth Dividend in the AI Era

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping India's economic structure and employment patterns. The India-AI Impact Summit 2026 places young people at the centre of this transition. India is moving from passive education toward skill-based participation and industry-linked learning. The focus is on employability, productivity, and technology-driven careers. Youth capability is being treated as a national growth driver. By aligning skills, infrastructure, and opportunity, India is positioning its young population to lead long-term economic transformation in the AI-driven global economy.

From Demographic Potential to Active AI Participation in India

1. **Shift toward skill-based engagement:** India is moving learning beyond theory toward hands-on problem solving, practical innovation, and market-oriented skill development.
2. **Youth-led innovation platforms:** Innovation challenges, startup pitches, and live solution demonstrations connect young talent directly with industry needs and real economic applications.
3. **Education–industry alignment:** India is strengthening pathways from classrooms to employment by linking learning outcomes with job requirements in AI-driven sectors.
4. **Youth participation as growth engine:** India is converting demographic capacity into productive workforce capability, making youth engagement central to economic and technological expansion.

AI-Driven Employment Transformation and Emerging Opportunities in India

1. **AI restructuring labour markets:** Artificial Intelligence is creating new roles, increasing productivity, and expanding employment pathways across technology and related sectors.
2. Sharp rise in AI job demand: AI-related vacancies increased from **2.9% to 6.5% between January 2023 and March 2025**, while demand for AI skills grew **75% faster than non-AI roles**, indicating structural labour market change.
3. **New employment skill requirements:** Digital fluency, advanced technical knowledge, and interdisciplinary capability are becoming essential for workforce participation.
4. Expansion of creative technology sectors: Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics are projected to generate **nearly 2 million jobs by 2030**, strengthening employment potential.
5. **AI as a pathway to future-ready work:** Technology is becoming a major channel for skill-intensive careers across multiple industries.

India's AI Talent Strategy: National Vision and Economic Orientation

1. **AI supporting inclusive economic growth:** India is using Artificial Intelligence to expand employment opportunities, enhance productivity, and strengthen talent development across sectors.
2. **Integration of skills, innovation and market demand:** India is aligning talent creation with industry needs through structured platforms that connect learning, innovation, and employment.
3. **Employment-focused technology strategy:** National priorities emphasise workforce readiness, productivity gains, and expansion of technology-driven job markets.
4. **Long-term global competitiveness goal:** India is treating AI capability as a strategic national asset for sustaining growth and strengthening global positioning.

Policy Support and Infrastructure Expansion by India

1. **Budget prioritisation of AI-linked industries:** India's Union Budget 2026–27 supports animation, gaming, digital content, and immersive media within the Orange Economy framework.
2. **Expansion of institutional skill infrastructure:** India is establishing **AI-aligned Content Creator Labs in 15,000 schools and 500 colleges**, expected to generate **around 20 lakh jobs**.
3. **Institutional coordination for workforce planning:** India has proposed an **Education to Employment and Enterprise Standing Committee** to assess AI's impact on jobs and skill requirements.
4. **Large-scale expansion of compute capacity:** India has allocated **over ₹10,300 crore** to expand infrastructure from **38,000 to over 58,000 GPUs**.
5. **Affordable access to AI resources:** India is providing compute access at **₹65 per hour**, reducing barriers for startups, innovators, and educational institutions.
6. **Inclusive national innovation ecosystem:** India is extending access to datasets, models, and infrastructure beyond metropolitan regions to ensure wider participation.

India's Multi-Level AI Talent Development Ecosystem

1. Foundational AI literacy in education

- India is embedding digital and AI competencies across educational levels, introducing computational thinking and ethical awareness from early stages.
- India is expanding public AI awareness through free literacy programmes in **11 languages**, targeting **1 crore citizens**.

2. Vocational and industry-aligned workforce training

- India is integrating AI into skill development, with **1.34 lakh learners trained under SOAR** through industry partnerships.
- India's FutureSkills Prime platform has **25.3 lakh registered learners** across **3,000+ courses**, supporting workforce upskilling in emerging technologies.
- India's unified digital skill platforms provide structured AI and machine learning training from introductory to advanced levels.

3. Advanced talent and research development

- India is supporting **500 PhD scholars, 5,000 postgraduates, and 8,000 undergraduates** through specialised fellowships and advanced skill programmes.
- India has established **27 AI labs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities**, with approvals for **174 additional labs**, expanding regional access to high-end training and applied research.

Indicators of India's Emerging Global AI Leadership

1. Innovation expanding beyond metropolitan centres: More than 50% of startups in India now emerge outside metro cities, reflecting decentralised innovation growth.
2. **High global AI skill penetration:** India's AI skill presence is **2.5 times the global average**, demonstrating large-scale capability development.
3. **Widespread enterprise adoption of AI: 87% of enterprises in India actively use AI solutions**, sustaining demand for skilled workers and strengthening school-to-work transitions.
4. **Large digitally adaptable youth base:** India's extensive participation in national learning programmes supports continuous innovation capacity.
5. **Commitment to responsible AI use:** India recorded **over 2.5 lakh AI responsibility pledges in 24 hours**, demonstrating strong public engagement with ethical and accountable technology use.

Conclusion

India is transforming youth potential into technological capability through coordinated skilling, policy support, and infrastructure expansion. Youth participation, employment growth, and responsible AI adoption are strengthening productivity and competitiveness. Continued alignment between education, skills, and industry

demand will sustain inclusion, expand regional participation, and reinforce India's long-term leadership in the global AI-driven economy.

Question for practice:

Examine how India is leveraging its youth population, policy initiatives, and skill development ecosystem to build a globally competitive workforce in the AI era.

Source: PIB

Supreme Court slammed the freebies culture of State Governments

Source: The post **"Supreme Court slammed the freebies culture of State Governments"** has been created, based on **"SC slams freebies culture, says states should open avenues for employment"** published in **"Hindustan Times" on 21 February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: The Supreme Court of India recently criticised the growing freebies culture while hearing a plea by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd regarding free electricity schemes. The Court observed that states should prioritise creating employment opportunities rather than distributing indiscriminate benefits. This debate highlights the tension between welfare policies and fiscal responsibility.

About the Freebies

1. Freebies are goods or services provided free of cost or at heavily subsidised rates without proper targeting of beneficiaries.
2. These schemes often include free electricity, free food grains, free bicycles, laptops, or unconditional cash transfers.
3. Political parties, including regional parties such as Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, frequently promise such schemes during elections to attract voters.

Key Observations by the Supreme Court

1. The Supreme Court stated that excessive freebies can hamper economic development because they divert funds from productive investments.
2. The Court noted that many states are revenue-deficit states but still offer free schemes, which increases fiscal stress.
3. It emphasised that states should distinguish between those who can afford services and those who cannot.
4. The Court also expressed concern that excessive handouts could negatively affect work culture.
5. Finally, it suggested that states should focus on creating employment opportunities instead of distributing universal freebies.

Issues Associated with Freebies

1. Freebies create fiscal stress because they increase state expenditure without generating revenue, leading to higher debt levels.
2. They distort economic priorities because funds meant for infrastructure, education, and health are diverted to consumption-based schemes.
3. Freebies may create moral hazard because continuous handouts can reduce incentives to work or seek employment.
4. They encourage political populism because parties compete to offer more benefits for short-term electoral gains.
5. Freebies are often inefficiently targeted, as benefits sometimes reach wealthy households instead of the poor.

Arguments in Favour of Freebies

1. Freebies can promote social justice because they help vulnerable groups cope with poverty and inflation.
2. Welfare measures are consistent with the idea of a welfare state, which aims to support citizens in need.
3. Certain subsidies improve human development by increasing access to education, healthcare, and nutrition.
4. Some welfare spending also increases demand in the economy because poorer households tend to spend more of their income.

Difference Between Welfare and Freebies

1. Welfare measures are targeted and aim at long-term empowerment, while freebies are often universal and focus on short-term consumption.
2. Welfare policies improve productivity by investing in human capital, whereas freebies usually do not create lasting economic benefits.
3. For example, skill development programs create employment opportunities, whereas distributing free gadgets may not improve long-term productivity.

Way Forward

1. States should provide targeted subsidies using Direct Benefit Transfer systems to ensure that only the needy receive support.
2. Governments should prioritise employment generation through promotion of MSMEs, labour-intensive industries, and skill development programs.
3. Fiscal responsibility laws should be strengthened so that states maintain sustainable debt levels.
4. The Election Commission of India should require political parties to disclose the fiscal impact of their promises.
5. Governments should invest more in productive welfare such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
6. Power sector reforms should be implemented to reduce losses and ensure rational electricity pricing.

Conclusion: The Supreme Court's remarks highlight the need to balance compassionate welfare policies with fiscal discipline. India should move from a culture of indiscriminate freebies to policies that empower citizens through employment and human capital development. Such a balanced approach will ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Question: Discuss the issues associated with the freebies culture in India. Also examine the difference between welfare and freebies and suggest measures to ensure fiscal prudence while protecting social justice.

Source: Hindustan Times

ISA launches global AI-for-Energy mission

Source: The post **"ISA launches global AI-for-Energy mission"** has been created, based on **"International Solar Alliance launches global AI-for-Energy mission to accelerate clean power in 120+ countries"** published in **"Down to earth" on 21 February 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and technology

Context: The International Solar Alliance launched a Global AI-for-Energy Mission at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 to accelerate clean energy adoption across more than 120 member countries. The mission recognises that achieving universal clean energy access now requires not only renewable capacity expansion but also intelligent digital infrastructure, advanced data systems, and citizen-centric platforms. The initiative particularly targets developing economies where electricity access is uneven and grids are weak, inefficient, or unable to integrate decentralised renewables.

Objectives of the AI-for-Energy Mission

1. Transform Energy Systems through AI

a. The mission aims to use artificial intelligence to improve grid resilience by enabling accurate demand forecasting, automated outage management, and predictive maintenance of infrastructure.
b. It seeks to reduce transmission and distribution losses, which remain high in many developing countries due to outdated systems.
c. AI tools will also optimise bidirectional energy flows as rooftop solar users become both consumers and producers of electricity.

2. Accelerate Deployment of Renewable Energy

a. The mission intends to scale rooftop solar programmes by simplifying registration, monitoring, and financing processes through digital platforms.
b. It encourages decentralised renewable systems such as mini-grids and community solar projects that can provide reliable power in remote areas.
c. By improving planning and grid integration, AI can ensure faster renewable energy deployment without destabilising power systems.

3. Align Policy, Data, and Finance

a. The initiative plans to harmonise regulatory frameworks across ISA member countries so that investments in clean energy can scale more easily.
b. It aims to create interoperable data systems that connect utilities, regulators, consumers, and financial institutions.
c. The mission also seeks to mobilise global climate finance and private sector investment by improving transparency and reducing risks in renewable energy projects.

4. Build Citizen-Centric Energy Systems

a. The mission emphasises digital consumer interfaces that allow households to monitor energy usage, apply for rooftop solar, and track subsidies.
b. It promotes inclusive energy services so that rural populations, small businesses, and low-income households can benefit from clean power.
c. Transparent billing systems and grievance mechanisms can improve trust in utilities and reduce disputes.

Role of AI in the Clean Energy Transition

1. Grid Modernisation

a. AI algorithms can forecast electricity demand based on weather patterns, economic activity, and consumption trends, enabling efficient generation planning.
b. Digital twin technology can simulate distribution networks to test scenarios, detect vulnerabilities, and plan infrastructure upgrades.
c. Real-time monitoring can reduce outages and enable faster restoration of services.

2. Integration of Decentralised Renewables

a. AI systems can manage distributed solar panels, storage batteries, and electric vehicles by balancing load and supply dynamically.
b. Smart metering and automated net-metering systems can ensure accurate compensation for rooftop solar users.
c. These tools allow countries to integrate renewables without investing heavily in traditional large-scale infrastructure.

3. Improved Service Delivery

a. AI-enabled platforms can automate customer onboarding for solar installations and energy connections, reducing delays and corruption.
b. Smart billing and targeted subsidies can ensure that government benefits reach intended households.
c. Analytics can detect power theft and technical losses, improving financial viability of utilities.

India's Digital Public Infrastructure Model

1. India showcased its digital public infrastructure approach in the power sector as a model that other ISA countries can adapt.
2. Interoperable platforms connect consumers, vendors, utilities, and banks, making energy services faster and more transparent.
3. Large-scale rooftop solar programmes have been accelerated through digital monitoring, financing tools, and streamlined approvals.
4. AI-based forecasting and grid optimisation have helped India manage growing renewable capacity while maintaining grid stability.

Innovations Demonstrated under the Mission

1. The Digital Consumer Interface "One Solar App" allows users to register rooftop solar systems, track generation, and manage net-metering transparently.
2. Digital Twin solutions for utilities create virtual replicas of electricity networks, enabling predictive maintenance and renewable integration planning.
3. GIS-based distribution modernisation projects improve infrastructure planning, asset tracking, and outage management using geospatial mapping.

Significance of the Mission

1. For Developing Countries

a. The mission enables countries to leapfrog outdated energy systems by adopting smart grids and decentralised renewable technologies.
b. Reliable electricity access can support education, healthcare, and economic development in underserved regions.
c. Reduced reliance on fossil fuels improves energy security.

2. For Climate Action

a. Faster renewable energy deployment reduces greenhouse gas emissions and supports global climate commitments.
b. AI-optimised systems ensure efficient use of renewable resources and minimise wastage.
c. The initiative supports global efforts toward sustainable development goals.

3. For Economic Growth

a. The mission can create green jobs in solar installation, AI services, and digital infrastructure development.
b. Lower energy costs improve industrial competitiveness and support entrepreneurship.
c. Innovation ecosystems can emerge around clean-energy technologies.

4. For Governance

a. Transparent digital platforms improve accountability in subsidy distribution and billing.
b. Citizen-centric services strengthen trust between utilities and consumers.
c. Data-driven policymaking leads to better planning and resource allocation.

Challenges in Implementation

1. Many ISA member countries face shortages of skilled professionals in AI and energy management.
2. Financing constraints may limit large-scale deployment of digital infrastructure.
3. Data privacy and cybersecurity risks must be addressed through strong regulations.
4. Differences in regulatory frameworks across countries may slow interoperability.

Way Forward

1. ISA should promote international cooperation among governments, multilateral agencies, and private companies to share best practices and technologies.
2. Capacity-building programmes should train engineers, policymakers, and technicians in AI-based energy management.
3. Standardised data protocols and cybersecurity frameworks should be developed across ISA members.
4. Innovative financing models such as green bonds and blended finance should support implementation.

Conclusion: The AI-for-Energy mission represents a transformative step in the global energy transition by combining renewable energy expansion with digital intelligence. By focusing on citizen-centric platforms, interoperable systems, and AI-driven grid management, the initiative can accelerate clean energy adoption while ensuring equitable access. If implemented effectively, the mission can help developing countries achieve sustainable growth, climate resilience, and energy security simultaneously.

Question: Discuss how artificial intelligence can transform energy systems in developing economies. What institutional, financial, and technological challenges may hinder its implementation?

Source: Down to Earth

Gen Z and the Dynamics of Democratic Engagement

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 1- Society

Introduction

Democratic systems across many societies are facing decline, weak accountability, and growing public frustration. In this setting, **Generation Z (1997–2012)** has emerged as a visible political force. Youth-led protests in Bangladesh (2024) and Nepal (2025) show new patterns of mobilisation. Their engagement reflects changing values, new social experiences, and different ways of practising democracy shaped by digital life, economic uncertainty, and evolving social expectations.

Understanding Gen Z

1. **Generational change in values:** Each generation reshapes ethics, social practices, and political expectations. New ideas carry traces of older traditions but appear unfamiliar to previous generations.
2. **Response to democratic decline:** Their rise occurs when many societies face authoritarian tendencies and unresponsive governance. Youth mobilisation reflects renewed democratic energy.
3. **Correcting the image of disengagement:** They were often seen as distracted and absorbed in virtual life. Organised protests showed structured and purposeful political expression.
4. **Democracy beyond formal institutions:** Democratic life depends not only on laws and structures but also on everyday moral practices and shared emotions. These deeper layers shape their responses.
5. **Emergent political subjectivity:** Their mobilisation reflects new forms of selfhood and social awareness. Their politics cannot be fully understood through conventional frameworks.

History of Gen Z Mobilisation

1. **Early participation before leadership:** Youth presence appeared in protests from 2010 onward, including UK student protests and riots. They participated even when not leading movements.
2. **Gradual global involvement in the 2010s:** Gen Z members appeared in events like the Arab Spring and Gezi Park protests. Their presence spread across regions over time.
3. **Rise of youth-led global campaigns:**
    - From the late 2010s, Gen Z began leading organised mobilisation. **March for Our Lives (2018)** and **Fridays for Future (2018)** marked early visible leadership.
    - Youth-led protests influenced major political events such as the Thai protests (2020–21) and the Sri Lankan uprising (2022).
4. **Global reach after 2024: Bangladesh (2024)** and **Nepal (2025)** saw regime-challenging protests led by Gen Z. Similar mobilisations spread across Asia, Africa, and South America.
5 **Recognition of a protest generation:** By 2025, widespread youth participation across countries led observers to describe a global protest wave shaped by Gen Z.

Characteristics of Gen Z

1. **Radical individualism with low prejudice:** They value personal autonomy but show less social prejudice and discrimination.
2. **Personal experience as political meaning:** Political understanding comes from lived experience and everyday treatment rather than abstract theory.
3. **Practice rather than ideology:** They prefer living their values instead of promoting rigid doctrines. They resist moral preaching and avoid preaching to others.
4. **Response to lived inequality:** They react strongly to direct experiences of hierarchy. However, they do not always frame these experiences in structural or systemic terms.
5. **Preference for virtual interaction:** They prefer expressing views on virtual platforms rather than physical interaction.
6. **Confidence combined with anxiety:** They are socially confident due to democratisation but deeply anxious due to shrinking economic opportunities.
7. **Mental health awareness:** Openness to counselling and therapy is common. Feelings of insecurity, workplace stress, and emotional strain influence political attitudes.
8. **Precarity shaping participation:** Economic uncertainty leads to fragmented and temporary involvement in political events.
9. **Consumption and identity formation:** Market access, technology, and education shape self-identity. Consumption patterns challenge inherited social hierarchies.
10. **Information as social dignity:** Access to information becomes a key source of dignity.

Comparison Between Gen Z Movements and Traditional Mass Movements

1. **Organisation versus spontaneity:** Traditional movements like the farmers' protest (2020–24) had leadership, structure, and sustained planning. Gen Z protests are spontaneous and decentralised.
2. **Duration and continuity:** Earlier movements continued for years with stable demands. Gen Z protests are episodic and short-lived.
3. **Ideological clarity versus fluid demands:** Traditional movements had clear ideological frameworks. Gen Z protests often lack defined ideological structures.
4. **Collective mobilisation versus individual participation:** Earlier protests relied on organised groups. Gen Z mobilisation reflects individual motivation and personal engagement.
5. **Sustained presence versus symbolic impact:** Traditional protests maintained physical continuity. Gen Z protests fade quickly but still produce significant psychological and political influence.

Why Gen Z Mobilisation Matters

1. **Challenge to democratic decline:** Their mobilisation offers renewed pressure against authoritarian tendencies and unresponsive governance.
2. **Transformation of protest culture:** Leaderless and episodic mobilisation changes how political participation operates.
3. **Shift from ideology to lived experience:** Political engagement increasingly reflects everyday emotions and personal realities.
4. **Social democratisation and self-awareness:** Expanded education and openness encourage reflection on identity and social position.
5. **Economic insecurity shaping political behaviour:** Limited opportunities create anxiety, influencing how and when they participate.
6. **Market and technology reshaping social equality:** Consumption and information weaken traditional caste and religious hierarchies.
7. **Unpredictable yet influential outcomes:** Even brief protests can reshape public discourse and political attention.

Conclusion

Gen Z represents a new form of democratic engagement shaped by individualism, digital interaction, and economic insecurity. Their protests are brief but influential, practical rather than ideological. They express politics through lived experience and personal assertion. Their impact is uncertain but transformative, making them central to understanding the evolving nature of democratic participation.

Question for practice:

Examine how Generation Z is reshaping the nature of democratic engagement through its distinct worldview, protest patterns, and forms of political participation.

Source: The Hindu

India–France Strategic Partnership in a Changing Global Order

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International relations

Introduction

India and France have strengthened their partnership through expanding defence cooperation, technological collaboration, and global coordination. The inauguration of the **Airbus H125 helicopter assembly line in Karnataka** and elevation of ties to a **Special Global Strategic Partnership** reflect growing strategic convergence. In a changing global order marked by uncertainty in Western alliances, France remains a stable and trusted partner for India, shaping cooperation across security, innovation, economic development, and global governance.

Foundations of France's Strategic Autonomy and India's Trust

1. **Gaullist strategic worldview:** France's political thinking is rooted in **Gaullism**, which emphasises sovereignty, strong national identity, and centralised state authority. This shapes its independent foreign policy and global strategic posture.
2. **Institutional independence in governance:** The **domaine réservé system (1958)** allows the French President to make long-term strategic decisions without domestic legislative gridlock. This ensures continuity in external commitments.
3. **Assertion of national interest in security policy:** France withdrew from NATO's integrated military command in **1966**, showing it would not operate under American control. This signals that national interest overrides bloc alignment.
4. **Transition from colonial past to strategic partner:** France moved from holding enclaves like **Pondicherry (Puducherry)** to becoming one of India's most dependable Western allies. Historical transformation strengthened mutual trust.
5. **Pragmatic diplomacy without ideological conditions:** France engages based on **mutual strategic and economic interests**, not domestic political standards or human rights conditionality. This makes agreements more flexible and predictable.

Diplomatic Support and Global Strategic Alignment

1. **Consistent backing in global institutions:** France acts as a strong diplomatic partner at the **UN Security Council**, often defending Indian interests and preventing international isolation.
2. **Support in critical geopolitical moments:** France refused to sanction India after the **1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests** and blocked attempts to internationalise the **Article 370 decision in 2019**.
3. **Replacement of Russia as Western strategic defender:** France increasingly serves as India's most reliable Western diplomatic supporter, especially when broader Western consensus is divided.
4. **Shared commitment to global governance reform:** Both countries support **reformed multilateralism**, a **rules-based international order**, and India's permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.

Formalisation and Expansion of Strategic Partnership

1. **Elevation to Special Global Strategic Partnership:** The relationship now covers defence, critical minerals, advanced technology, climate action, health, education, and economic security.

2. **Long-term strategic roadmap:** The partnership builds on the **1998 Strategic Partnership** and the **Horizon 2047 Roadmap**, with an annual Foreign Ministers Comprehensive Dialogue for coordination.
3. **Deeper regional and global coordination:** Cooperation extends across bilateral, regional, and global levels, especially in the **Indo-Pacific**, economic security, and international diplomacy.
4. **Innovation and technology cooperation platforms:** The **2026 India–France Year of Innovation** and **India–France Innovation Network** link startups, institutions, and businesses across both countries.

Expanding Multi-Sector Strategic Cooperation

1. **Defence industrial collaboration:** Joint production initiatives include **HAMMER missile manufacturing**, reciprocal military officer deployment, and a Joint Advanced Technology Development Group for emerging technologies.
2. **Aerospace and military capability development:** The **H125 helicopter assembly line in Vemagal**, Rafale-Marine procurement, and cooperation on jet engines and multi-role helicopters strengthen defence manufacturing.
3. **Critical minerals and supply chain security:** Cooperation in exploration, processing, and recycling of **rare earths and critical minerals** aims to build resilient clean energy and manufacturing supply chains.
4. **Artificial intelligence and advanced research:** The **Indo-French Centre for AI in Health at AIIMS**, created with Sorbonne University and the Paris Brain Institute, promotes public-interest AI development.
5. **Economic and financial cooperation:** Amendment of the **Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** improves investor certainty, while France expands adoption of **India's UPI digital payment system**.
6. **Climate, nuclear and energy engagement:** Collaboration includes renewable energy, civil nuclear discussions, and joint initiatives like the **International Solar Alliance** and **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**.
7. **Indo-Pacific and global security coordination:** Both countries support a **free and open Indo-Pacific**, cooperate in IMEC and trilateral frameworks, and align on Ukraine conflict resolution and counter-terrorism.
8. **People-to-people and knowledge exchange:** France plans to host **30,000 Indian students by 2030**, expand academic partnerships, and support skill development and cultural cooperation.

Expanding Cooperation Amid Economic and Technological Challenges

1. **Trade imbalance and export decline:** Bilateral goods trade reached **$15.2 billion in FY 2024–25**, but Indian exports fell **11% in April–November 2025**, largely due to declining refined petroleum exports.
2. **Nuclear liability dispute**
    - **Delaying cooperation:** The **9,900 MW Jaitapur nuclear project** remains stalled because EDF rejects supplier liability under India's nuclear liability framework.
    - **Financial risk sharing tensions:** France supports India globally but expects India to bear the full financial risk of a potential nuclear accident in joint projects.
3. **Technology transfer and intellectual property concerns:** Industrial partnerships generate jobs but limited intellectual property access restricts true technological sovereignty.
4. **Risk of strategic dependency shift:** Replacing reliance on Russian defence equipment with French systems without deep technology transfer may only change the source of dependence.

Conclusion

France remains India's most reliable Western partner in a changing global order. Strong diplomatic trust, expanding cooperation, and shared strategic interests sustain the relationship. However, trade imbalances, nuclear liability disputes, and limited technology transfer require careful management. India must leverage this partnership to secure deeper technological capacity and achieve genuine long-term strategic autonomy.

Question for practice:

Discuss the significance of the India–France Strategic Partnership in the changing global order, highlighting its foundations, areas of cooperation, and key challenges.

Source: Indian Express