

# 9 PM Current Affairs Monthly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



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Features :

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Most complete coverage of major  
News Papers editorials

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## AI anxiety can turn into an advantage for Atmanirbhar India

**Source:** The post “AI anxiety can turn into an advantage for Atmanirbhar India” has been created, based on “AI anxiety can turn into an advantage for Atmanirbhar India” published in “Indian Express” on 02nd March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Science and technology**

**Context:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a transformative technology that can accelerate productivity, efficiency, and economic growth. Although AI creates fears about job losses and inequality, historical experience shows that technological change ultimately generates new opportunities. With proper policies, India can convert AI anxiety into a major advantage for achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat.

### AI and Economic Growth

1. Artificial Intelligence is expected to significantly improve productivity and accelerate economic development across sectors.
2. Many experts believe that AI represents an inflection point in human progress, similar to the impact of the internet.
3. The theory of creative destruction proposed by Joseph Schumpeter explains that new technologies replace outdated systems but create higher efficiency and long-term growth.
4. Countries and industries that fail to adopt AI risk falling behind in global competition.
5. Over time, technological change expands the economy and creates new jobs requiring higher skills and better wages.

### AI and Employment Concerns

1. There is concern that AI may displace workers in several sectors, especially in routine jobs.
2. Kristalina Georgieva has warned that a large proportion of jobs may be affected by AI adoption.
3. However, leaders such as Mukesh Ambani argue that AI will generate new employment opportunities in India.
4. Similar fears existed when computers were introduced during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi, but computerisation ultimately strengthened India’s economy.
5. Some workers may face short-term losses, but the overall economy is likely to benefit in the long run.
6. Skill development and reskilling programmes are necessary to help workers transition to new roles.

### AI and Inequality

1. Early adopters of AI technology are likely to gain more benefits in the short run.
2. High investment and energy requirements create barriers for developing countries.
3. However, technology usually becomes cheaper over time, making it accessible to more people.
4. India has shown its ability to create low-cost technological solutions through innovations like UPI and space achievements like Chandrayaan-3.
5. India can develop affordable AI solutions for the Global South and reduce inequality.

### AI and Agriculture

1. Agriculture employs about 46 percent of India’s workforce, making it highly important in the AI transition.
2. AI can improve precision farming by optimising inputs such as water and fertilisers.
3. AI can also enhance efficiency in logistics, storage, marketing, and food processing.
4. Government initiatives such as AgriStack aim to integrate AI into the agricultural ecosystem.

5. AI has the potential to increase productivity and farmer incomes rather than simply replace labour.

### Challenges

1. India currently lags behind major powers like the US and China in AI research, investment, and infrastructure.
2. The high cost of AI development and large energy requirements may limit rapid expansion.
3. Job displacement in the short term may create social and political pressure.
4. Inequality may increase if only skilled workers and large companies benefit from AI adoption.
5. Data privacy, data ownership, and regulatory issues remain unresolved.
6. India risks becoming only a consumer of foreign AI technologies instead of building its own ecosystem.

### Way Forward

1. India must invest heavily in AI research, infrastructure, and innovation through public-private partnerships.
2. The government must expand skill development and reskilling programmes to prepare workers for AI-driven jobs.
3. Social protection measures should be provided to workers affected by automation.
4. India must create a clear regulatory framework addressing data ownership, privacy, and ethical AI use.
5. Indigenous AI models and applications must be developed to ensure technological self-reliance.
6. India should focus on developing low-cost AI solutions that can be scaled across the Global South.
7. Collaboration between government, industry, and academia is essential for building a strong AI ecosystem.

**Conclusion:** Artificial Intelligence represents a process of creative destruction that will disrupt existing systems but create new opportunities. If India adopts proactive policies, invests in skills and innovation, and builds indigenous capabilities, AI anxiety can become a major strength. In this way, AI can support inclusive growth and help India achieve true Atmanirbhar Bharat.

**Question:** “Artificial Intelligence can transform India’s economy despite fears of job losses.” Discuss.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

### **Strait of Hormuz oil flows dry up: How this affects India, and the options ahead**

**Source:** The post “**Strait of Hormuz oil flows dry up: How this affects India, and the options ahead**” has been created, based on “**Strait of Hormuz oil flows dry up: How this affects India, and the options ahead**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 02nd March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations**

The recent escalation of conflict involving Iran, United States and Israel has severely disrupted energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz, the world’s most critical oil transit chokepoint. Since India depends heavily on energy imports routed through this passage, any disruption has significant economic and strategic implications.

### **Importance of the Strait of Hormuz**

1. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
2. It handles nearly one-fifth of global liquid petroleum consumption and a large share of global LNG trade.
3. Approximately 15 million barrels of crude oil pass through the strait every day.

4. Even if alternative pipelines are fully utilised, around 9% of global oil demand would remain structurally at risk if the strait is closed.

## Impact on India

### I. Oil Imports

1. Around half of India's crude oil imports, roughly 2.5–2.7 million barrels per day, pass through the strait.
2. India is the world's third-largest oil consumer and imports more than 88% of its crude requirement.
3. A disruption would increase oil prices, and every \$1 per barrel increase could raise India's annual import bill by \$1.8–2 billion.
4. Although India has crude inventories of over 10 days and some fuel stocks, sustained disruption would increase economic pressure.

### II. LPG and LNG Vulnerability

1. India imports 80–85% of its LPG needs, mostly from Gulf countries via Hormuz.
2. India does not maintain strategic LPG reserves at the same scale as crude oil reserves.
3. Around 60% of India's LNG imports also transit through the strait.
4. Unlike crude oil, LPG and LNG have limited spot market availability, making them more vulnerable during prolonged disruption.

### Likely Price and Market Impact

1. Brent crude prices have already risen sharply due to geopolitical tensions.
2. In the event of prolonged disruption, oil prices could rise above \$100 per barrel.
3. Even a short-term closure of one to two weeks could create tanker congestion and logistical backlogs lasting several weeks.
4. However, experts believe a complete and prolonged blockade is unlikely due to international military presence and global economic consequences.

### India's Near-Term Options

1. India can draw from its strategic petroleum reserves to cushion short-term supply shocks.
2. Indian refiners can accelerate spot purchases from non-Hormuz regions.
3. India can increase sourcing from countries such as Russia, the United States, West Africa, and Latin America.
4. The availability of Russian cargoes in floating storage in the Indian Ocean region provides additional flexibility.
5. Diversification of supply sources reduces the risk of a sustained supply crisis.

### Challenges

1. India's high import dependence makes it structurally vulnerable to external shocks.
2. LPG and LNG imports have thinner structural buffers compared to crude oil.
3. Rising oil prices would increase inflation and widen the current account deficit.
4. Prolonged geopolitical instability in West Asia could disrupt supply chains beyond energy.
5. Shipping insurance costs and war-risk premiums would further increase import costs.

### Way Forward

1. India must further diversify its crude and gas import sources to reduce dependence on any single transit route.

2. The country should expand its strategic petroleum reserves and explore creating strategic LPG storage capacity.
3. Long-term contracts with alternative suppliers should be strengthened to ensure energy security.
4. India must accelerate the transition towards renewable energy and domestic energy production to reduce import dependence.
5. Diplomatic engagement with Gulf countries and major powers should be strengthened to ensure stability in critical maritime routes.
6. Energy efficiency measures and demand management strategies should be promoted to reduce vulnerability to price shocks.

**Conclusion:** The disruption in the Strait of Hormuz highlights the fragility of global energy supply chains and India's dependence on external energy sources. While India has short-term buffers and diversified sourcing options, prolonged disruption would strain the economy. Strengthening energy security through diversification, strategic reserves, and clean energy transition is essential for safeguarding India's long-term economic stability.

**Question:** Discuss how disruptions in West Asian conflicts involving Iran, United States, and Israel can impact India's economy.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

## Sixteenth Finance Commission — Misses and Concerns

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

### Introduction

The Sixteenth Finance Commission worked with unusual flexibility because its terms of reference flowed directly from constitutional provisions. It examined both **vertical devolution** and **horizontal devolution**. It retained the States' share at **41%**, yet important design choices and omissions have raised concerns about constitutional balance, effective transfers, and equalisation across States. The core issue is not only the percentage share but the overall structure of fiscal transfers.

### Constitutional Role and Background of the Sixteenth Commission

#### 1. Duty under Articles 270 and 280:

Articles 270 and 280 of the Indian Constitution establish the framework for India's fiscal federalism.

Article 270 mandates the distribution of net tax proceeds (divisible pool) between the Centre and States, while

Article 280 provides for the constitution of a Finance Commission every five years to recommend the manner of this distribution and grants-in-aid.

**2. Shift after the Fourteenth Commission:** The share of States increased from **32% to 42%** because State plan grants, which were about **3% of the divisible pool**, were discontinued. It was later reduced to **41%** due to the change in the status of Jammu and Kashmir.

3. **Centre's concern over fiscal space:** The Centre expressed concern about reduced fiscal space after the increase to 42%.

4. **Retention of 41% share:** The Sixteenth Commission retained **41%**, giving it a semi-permanent character.

#### What the Sixteenth Finance Commission Misses

1. **No clear recommendation on cesses and surcharges:** Non-shareable cesses and surcharges should be limited and for specific purposes. The Commission made no direct recommendation to restrict their increase.

2. **Grand bargain proposal instead of correction:** It recommended a 'grand bargain' (paragraph 7.67) between the Centre and States saying that 'States would agree to a smaller share in the resulting larger divisible pool, with no loss of revenues to either side' provided the Centre agreed to merge a large part of the cesses and surcharges in the regular taxes.

3. **Weak assertion of constitutional responsibility:** The Commission did not clearly state that the steep increase in cesses and surcharges was not warranted or not in the spirit of the Constitution.

4. **Discontinuation of revenue deficit and specific grants:** It stopped revenue deficit grants and did not recommend State-specific or sector-specific grants. This reduced an important balancing tool.

5. **No adjustment for GST reforms:** It did not factor in the revenue-reducing impact of major GST reforms undertaken in **September 2025**.

6. **Optimistic growth assumption:** It assumed **11% nominal GDP growth for 2026-27**, higher than the Budget estimate of **10%**, which may lead to overestimation of projections.

#### Major Concerns in Design and Outcomes

1. **Effective transfers show decline:** Transfers as a share of the Centre's pre-transfer gross revenue receipts were **27.0%, 27.2%, and 28.3%** in the 11th, 12th, and 13th periods. They rose to **35.6%** in the 14th and fell slightly to **34.4%** in the 15th. For **2026-27**, the estimate is **32.7%**, indicating a decline.

2. **Centre's response after 14th Commission:** The Centre increased non-shareable cesses and surcharges, reduced its share in centrally sponsored schemes, and did not accept some sector-specific and State-specific grants recommended by the Fifteenth Commission.

3. **Introduction of contribution criterion:** A new efficiency criterion was added based on a State's share in total GSDP. The square root of GSDP was used to reduce excessive impact.

4. **Production efficiency versus fiscal efficiency:** GSDP depends on movement of capital and labour and market concentration. It does not directly measure fiscal effort.

5. **Opposite use of GSDP in formula:** Lower per capita GSDP increases share under income distance. Higher per capita GSDP increases share under contribution. This creates internal tension.

6. **Dropping tax effort criterion:** The fiscal discipline or tax effort criterion was removed, even though it directly measured fiscal efficiency.

7. **Purely judgemental weight changes:** Weights of some criteria were altered without objective justification.

8. **Distributional losses and gains:** Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan lost share compared to the Fifteenth Commission. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim, and Goa also lost. Gains among richer States were not uniform.

### Way Forward

1. **Use Article 275 for needs-based transfers:** Grants for State-specific needs can equalise standards in health and education. These should not be confused with revenue deficits.

2. **Restore normatively determined revenue gap grants:** If devolution formula changes cause losses, revenue gap grants can neutralise them.

3. **Limit and earmark cesses and surcharges:** These should remain finite and purpose-specific rather than merged into general funds.

4. **Balance performance and equalisation:** Efficiency concerns of richer States can be accommodated while still protecting the equalisation objective.

5. **Devolution alone cannot capture cost and need differentials:** India's highly differentiated States require tools beyond formula-based devolution to address variations in costs and service needs.

### Conclusion

The Sixteenth Finance Commission retained the **41% share** but allowed effective transfers to decline. It avoided a firm position on rising cesses and discontinued revenue gap grants. The contribution criterion created internal inconsistencies. Equalisation remains essential in a diverse federation. Fiscal design must protect constitutional balance, fairness, and objective determination of States' share.

### Question for practice:

Examine the major misses and concerns associated with the Sixteenth Finance Commission, particularly in relation to vertical and horizontal devolution, effective transfers, and the equalisation objective.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Skill India as Herculean Challenges, Galgotian Blunders

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

### Introduction

India's demographic dividend, which ends by **2040**, offers a rare opportunity to transform the country into a global skill hub. Yet vocational education remains deeply neglected, with only **1.3% of secondary students enrolled**, compared to nearly **50% in the European Union and China**. Despite ambitious targets under the National Education Policy 2020, weak financing, fragmented schemes, and repeated implementation failures have created a gap between aspiration and reality.

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## Major Concerns Related to India's Skill Mission

- 1. Low Vocational Participation:** Only **1.3% of secondary students** are enrolled in vocational streams, while several EU countries and China have nearly **50% participation**.
- 2. Limited Financial Commitment:** Vocational education receives around **2% of education budgets globally**, but **China and Germany spend 11%**, showing stronger policy commitment.
- 3. Fragmented Financing Structure:** There is no publicly available consolidated data because training schemes are spread across multiple Ministries.
- 4. Inconsistent Budget-Based Strategy:** Skill policy depends heavily on yearly Budget announcements. Schemes celebrated one year are forgotten the next.
- 5. Poor Scheme Utilisation:** The FY2026 internship scheme used only **5% of allocated funds**, showing design and execution failure.
- 6. Financial Impropriety and Weak Accountability:** The Comptroller and Auditor General of India audited the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (2015–22) and found serious lapses. **94.5% bank accounts were invalid**, and only **41% trainees received placement**.
- 7. Quantity Over Quality:** The short-term skill ecosystem focused on numbers rather than outcomes, producing limited employment results.
- 8. Supply-driven government financing:** Skill programmes remain largely government-funded with limited employer ownership and weak industry responsibility.

## Structural Gaps in the Present System

- 1. Weak employer engagement:** Industry participation remains limited, and employers do not own the skill development process, making the system largely state-driven.
- 2. Institutional drift in National Skill Development Corporation:** The National Skill Development Corporation began as a non-banking finance company, later funded training partners, and now primarily implements government schemes, showing deviation from its original market-based role.
- 3. No stable financing framework:** Skill funding remains vulnerable to political and Budget cycles instead of being based on a sustainable and insulated financial model.
- 4. Absence of real-time labour market information:** Periodic skill-gap studies continue, but a proper labour market information system has not materialised, weakening demand-based planning.

## Initiatives Taken

- 1. NEP 2020 vocational target:** The policy aims to expose **50% learners to vocational education by 2025**, though the emphasis on “exposure” reflects limited depth of integration.
- 2. PMKVY as flagship programme:** PMKVY aimed to build a public-private short-term skill ecosystem through large-scale government financing.

3. **Internship scheme (FY2026):** The scheme attempted to connect training with industry exposure but suffered from weak utilisation and ineffective design.

#### What Should Be Done?

1. **Shift Part of PMKVY Funding to Skill Loans:** Instead of operational grants, over ₹10,000 crore annually can be extended as skill loans using a framework similar to educational loans, increasing student choice while managing risks like non-performing assets.
2. **Introduce trainee-based skill vouchers:** Public funds should follow the trainee rather than institutions, improving accountability and competition, as successfully implemented in **Singapore and Croatia**.
3. **Use vouchers for AI, digital and green transitions:** Skill vouchers can support **AI-led transition**, promote digital and green skills, enhance women workforce participation, and provide foreign language training for global labour markets.
4. **Adopt payroll-linked skill levies (Reimbursable Industry Contribution):** More than **90 countries** use levy-based systems, including **Germany, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and several Latin American countries**, ensuring sustainable financing insulated from political cycles.
5. **Link firm contribution to reimbursement:** Contributions based on payroll and firm size should be returned after training, making employers responsible for skill development and shifting the system from government-financed to employer-owned.
6. **Build real-time labour market information system:** Online job boards should share aggregate data with safeguards, and AI-based modelling should guide planning through the National Career Service portal instead of relying on periodic skill-gap studies.

#### Conclusion

India's demographic dividend closes by **2040**, leaving limited time for reform. The present model suffers from weak financing, poor accountability, and limited employer ownership. A shift to skill loans, vouchers, industry levies, and real-time labour data can create a demand-driven system. Without course correction, the opportunity to become a global skill capital may be lost.

#### Question for practice:

Discuss the major challenges facing India's Skill Mission and evaluate the structural reforms needed to transform it into a demand-driven and employer-owned skill development system before 2040.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### India's Transformation into a Global Health Powerhouse

**Source:** The post "India's Transformation into a Global Health Powerhouse" has been created, based on "India's Transformation into a Global Health Powerhouse" published in "Indian Express" on 03rd March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Science and technology**

**Context:** India has transformed from a country battling endemic diseases into a global health powerhouse through universal health coverage, digital innovation, pharmaceutical strength, and expanded medical infrastructure. Flagship programmes such as Ayushman Bharat, the National Health Mission, and large-scale immunisation drives have strengthened healthcare access and improved public health outcomes. India has also emerged as the “Pharmacy of the World,” supplying affordable medicines and vaccines globally while advancing biotechnology and medical education.

### **Key Pillars of India’s Health Transformation**

#### **Universal Health Coverage**

1. The Ayushman Bharat programme aims to provide universal health coverage, especially to socio-economically disadvantaged populations.
2. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana provides ₹5 lakh per family annually for secondary and tertiary care and covers the bottom 40 percent of the population as well as senior citizens above 70 years.
3. Over 434 million Ayushman cards have been issued, significantly reducing catastrophic health expenditures for families.
4. Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have expanded primary healthcare services, with over 1.84 lakh centres operational across urban, rural, and tribal areas.
5. The PM–Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission is strengthening public health labs, critical care blocks, and block-level health units to enhance pandemic preparedness.

#### **Digital Health and Technology**

1. The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission has created over 863 million digital health IDs to enable secure and interoperable medical records.
2. Artificial intelligence tools are being integrated into diagnostics, record management, tuberculosis monitoring, and diabetic retinopathy screening.
3. Drone-based delivery initiatives are improving last-mile connectivity in hilly and remote regions.

#### **Strengthening Public Health Outcomes**

1. The National Health Mission has significantly reduced maternal mortality, under-five mortality, and tuberculosis incidence.
2. The Universal Immunisation Programme covers millions of newborns and pregnant women annually with free vaccines.
3. Mission Indradhanush has reduced the number of zero-dose children and improved immunisation coverage.
4. A nationwide HPV vaccination programme has been launched to prevent cervical cancer among adolescent girls.

#### **Pharmaceutical and Biopharma Leadership**

1. India is the third-largest pharmaceutical producer by volume and supplies 20 percent of global generic medicines.
2. It provides 55–60 percent of UNICEF’s vaccines and over 70 percent of global anti-retroviral medicines.
3. Indigenous vaccine development during COVID-19 demonstrated India’s research and manufacturing capability.
4. The bioeconomy has grown significantly and is projected to reach \$300 billion by 2030.

#### **Affordable Medicines and Medical Tourism**

1. The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana provides quality generic medicines at 50–90 percent lower prices through thousands of outlets.
2. The AMRIT initiative supports affordable tertiary care medicines and implants.
3. Medical tourism has expanded substantially, and new integrated medical hubs have been announced to boost this sector.

### Expansion of Medical Education

1. The number of medical colleges and seats has increased significantly over the past decade.
2. There are now 23 AIIMS institutions and more than 2,000 medical colleges across the country.
3. MBBS and postgraduate seats have expanded to meet growing healthcare demands.

### Challenges

1. Significant disparities in healthcare access still exist between urban and rural areas, particularly in remote and tribal districts.
2. There is a persistent shortage of specialist doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff in several regions.
3. Although government schemes have reduced costs, out-of-pocket health expenditure remains high for many households.
4. Public health infrastructure in some areas faces issues of maintenance, quality control, and equipment shortages.
5. The rising burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer is increasing long-term healthcare costs.
6. Digital health initiatives face concerns related to data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital literacy.
7. Dependence on imported active pharmaceutical ingredients for certain drugs creates supply chain vulnerabilities.
8. Emerging infectious diseases, climate change, and antimicrobial resistance pose long-term systemic risks.

### Way Forward

1. The government should further strengthen primary healthcare by ensuring adequate staffing, quality standards, and regular monitoring across all health centres.
2. Public health expenditure should be increased gradually as a percentage of GDP to reduce out-of-pocket expenses and improve service delivery.
3. Greater focus should be placed on preventive healthcare, lifestyle awareness campaigns, and early screening for non-communicable diseases.
4. Investments in medical education and skill development should continue to bridge human resource gaps in underserved areas.
5. Strong data protection laws and cybersecurity frameworks should support the expansion of digital health infrastructure.
6. Domestic manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients and medical devices should be promoted to ensure self-reliance.
7. Public-private partnerships should be expanded in research, biotechnology, telemedicine, and medical tourism.
8. Continuous monitoring, cooperative federalism, and evidence-based policymaking should guide implementation to sustain long-term progress.

**Conclusion:** India's transformation into a global health powerhouse is rooted in universal health coverage, digital innovation, pharmaceutical leadership, and institutional expansion. With over 1.84 lakh primary health centres, 863 million digital health IDs, and strong vaccine and medicine manufacturing capacity, India has

positioned itself as a model of affordable and inclusive healthcare. As the country advances toward the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047, it is poised to play a leading role in global public health governance and health equity.

**Question:** Discuss the role of Ayushman Bharat in advancing Universal Health Coverage in India. Highlight its achievements and limitations.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

## Israel, the U.S. and a War to Build a Unipolar West Asia

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-International Relation.

### Introduction

In February 2026, even as nuclear negotiations were close to success under Omani mediation, **the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran**, killing its Supreme Leader and senior officials. The timing showed that the issue was not only nuclear control. It signalled a broader attempt to remove Iran's regime and **reshape the regional balance of power in West Asia**.

### Iran as the Last Strategic Challenger in West Asia

- 1. Iran as the only revisionist power:** Iran is seen as the only state in West Asia openly challenging Israel's supremacy. Many Arab states host American bases or depend on U.S. aid, but **Iran continues to resist this regional order**.
- 2. Nuclear deal versus broader security concerns:** In 2015, President Barack Obama aimed to restrict Iran's nuclear programme for regional stability. However, Israel opposed the deal because its concern included **Iran's conventional strength and advanced missile capability**.
- 3. Demand for total disarmament:** Israel demanded that any agreement include Iran's missile programme and support to militias. Iranian leaders viewed this as surrendering their **last deterrent**, making acceptance unlikely.
- 4. Regime change as geopolitical gain:** With Iraq, Libya and Syria weakened, Iran remains the last major independent force. If the Islamic Republic falls, **West Asia would move toward a unipolar order centred on Israel, fully backed by Washington**.

### A War of Regime Change, Regional Escalation and Strategic Uncertainty

- 1. From diplomacy to decapitation:** On February 27, Oman's Foreign Minister stated that Iran had committed not to build a nuclear bomb. Within hours, strikes began and Iran's top leadership was killed, showing that **force replaced diplomacy**.
- 2. Decapitation without ground invasion:** Iran is about 70 times bigger than Israel and protected by mountains. Since no country is willing to invade, Israel adopted a **decapitation strategy** by targeting top leaders.

3. **Limits of military shock:** In June 2025, after a 12-day war, Iran reorganised and retaliated. In February 2026, even after the killing of its Supreme Leader, the regime did not collapse, proving that **leadership assassination does not guarantee regime change**.

4. **From limited war to regional conflict:** Unlike the earlier war, Iran expanded its response by striking American bases across the Persian Gulf and Israel. This marked a shift from bilateral conflict to **regional confrontation**.

5. **Closure of the Strait of Hormuz:** Iran announced the shutting of the Strait of Hormuz, through which **one-third of global energy supply flows**. This move widened the war and created global economic risk.

6. **Strategic imbalance and uncertainty:** The U.S.–Israel alliance has strong conventional superiority. However, military strength alone does not ensure victory, as Iran’s strategy is to prolong conflict and deny a quick triumph.

### Implications of this War

1. **Regional destabilisation:** The conflict has drawn Gulf monarchies into tension and risks turning into a cross-Gulf war. West Asia is facing **one of its most dangerous phases since the Second World War**.

2. **Global economic shock:** Disruption of Hormuz threatens global energy trade and oil markets. Major importers such as **India face serious economic risks**.

3. **Exhaustion of defence systems:** A prolonged conflict could exhaust missile defence shields protecting American bases and Israel. This would increase regional vulnerability.

4. **Collapse of diplomacy:** The war began despite active negotiations. The U.S. withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018, and again force replaced talks in 2025 and 2026, weakening trust in diplomatic solutions.

5. **Erosion of international norms:** The war was described as “pre-emptive,” yet there was no evidence of an imminent Iranian attack. The killing of top leaders during negotiations raises serious concerns about **respect for international law**.

### Conclusion

This conflict is not limited to nuclear concerns. It reflects a larger attempt to reshape West Asia’s balance of power. However, Iran’s resistance and regional escalation show that regime change through force is uncertain and risky. If the war continues, it may deepen instability, damage global order, and leave the region more divided than before.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how the Israel–U.S. war against Iran reflects an attempt to reshape West Asia’s balance of power, and examine its regional, strategic and global implications.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Legal framework that governs maritime conflict

**Source:** The post “legal framework that governs maritime conflict” has been created, based on “Was US legally right in sinking Iranian ship? What framework governing maritime conflict says” published in “Indian Express” on 06th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations**

**Context:** The sinking of the Iranian warship **IRIS Dena** by a US submarine in international waters near **Sri Lanka** has raised significant concerns about the legality of the use of force at sea. Maritime conflicts are primarily governed by the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**, the **United Nations Charter**, and customary international law relating to naval warfare.

### Legal Framework Governing Maritime Conflict

#### (a) United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

1. UNCLOS regulates maritime zones, navigation rights, and resource use primarily during peacetime.
2. It does not contain detailed provisions governing the conduct of hostilities during armed conflict at sea.
3. Therefore, during conflicts, the law of naval warfare operates alongside UNCLOS.

#### (b) Law of Naval Warfare

1. Under customary international law, warships belonging to an enemy state can be considered legitimate military targets during armed conflict.
2. The presence of a warship in international waters does not grant immunity from attack if hostilities exist between the states involved.

#### (c) UN Charter Provisions

1. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits the use of force against another state.
2. Article 51 allows states to use force in self-defence if an armed attack occurs.
3. Military action may also be authorised by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter.

#### (d) International Humanitarian Law at Sea

1. Naval warfare must follow principles of necessity, proportionality, and distinction.
2. Attacks must be directed only at legitimate military targets and must avoid excessive harm.

### Arguments Supporting the Legality of the US Action

1. If the United States and Iran were already engaged in an armed conflict, the Iranian warship could legally be treated as a military target.
2. Warships are sovereign military assets and are generally considered lawful targets during hostilities.
3. The United States may justify the strike under the right to self-defence provided under Article 51 of the UN Charter.
4. The attack occurred in international waters, where no country exercises complete sovereignty.

### Arguments Questioning the Legality of the Strike

1. If the Iranian warship was on a peaceful passage and not engaged in combat operations, the attack could be considered unlawful.
2. The use of force without clear evidence of self-defence may violate Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

3. The absence of explicit authorisation from the UN Security Council raises concerns regarding unilateral military action.
4. Attacking a vessel outside an active conflict zone may be viewed as a significant escalation of the conflict.

### Strategic Implications

1. The incident expands the theatre of the US-Iran conflict beyond West Asia into the Indian Ocean region.
2. It raises maritime security concerns for regional powers such as **India**.
3. The episode highlights gaps in global maritime governance during armed conflicts.

### Way Forward

1. The international community should strengthen legal norms governing naval warfare to address grey areas in maritime conflicts.
2. Greater reliance on multilateral institutions such as the **United Nations Security Council** is required to regulate the use of force at sea.
3. Countries should enhance maritime confidence-building measures and communication channels to prevent accidental escalation.
4. Regional powers should promote cooperative maritime security frameworks in sensitive regions such as the Indian Ocean.
5. There is a need to reinforce adherence to international humanitarian law and ensure accountability for violations during maritime conflicts.

**Conclusion:** While the law of naval warfare allows the targeting of enemy warships during armed conflict, the legality of the strike on **IRIS Dena** ultimately depends on whether it can be justified under self-defence or as part of an ongoing conflict. The incident underscores the urgent need to strengthen international maritime governance and conflict-management mechanisms.

**Question:** In the context of the recent sinking of the Iranian warship IRIS Dena by a US submarine near Sri Lanka, discuss the legal framework governing maritime conflict in international waters. Was the action legally justified?

Source: [Indian Express](#)

### Strategy to secure critical minerals

**Source:** The post “Strategy to secure critical minerals” has been created, based on “Strategy to secure critical minerals” published in “BusinessLine” on 06th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Science and technology**

**Context:** Critical minerals such as **Lithium, Cobalt, Copper and Rare Earth Elements** are essential for clean energy technologies, artificial intelligence infrastructure, advanced electronics, and defence systems. The rapid expansion of the green transition and AI-driven industries has significantly increased the global demand for these minerals. However, the supply chains are concentrated in a few countries, especially **China**, which creates strategic vulnerabilities for **India**.

### Importance of Securing Critical Minerals for India

1. Critical minerals are essential for manufacturing renewable energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, and electric vehicle batteries.

2. Securing these minerals is necessary for achieving India's climate commitments and net-zero emission targets.
3. Critical minerals are widely used in artificial intelligence hardware, semiconductors, and advanced electronic devices, which are vital for technological advancement.
4. Many defence technologies such as missiles, radar systems, and advanced aerospace equipment depend on these minerals, making them crucial for national security.
5. A secure supply of critical minerals can support India's industrial growth, manufacturing competitiveness, and economic development.

### Government Initiatives

1. The **National Critical Mineral Mission** aims to strengthen exploration, mining, and processing of critical minerals with an outlay of ₹34,000 crore over seven years.
2. The government has proposed the development of rare earth corridors to create integrated mining-to-processing value chains.
3. The Union Budget has provided exemption from Basic Customs Duty on capital goods used for processing critical minerals to encourage investment.
4. India is also securing overseas mineral assets through **Khanij Bidesh India Limited** partnerships with countries such as Australia, Argentina, and Chile.

### Challenges in India's Critical Mineral Sector

1. The global supply of critical minerals is highly concentrated in a few countries, particularly China, which dominates mining and refining activities.
2. India currently lacks large-scale commercially viable refining and downstream processing facilities for critical minerals.
3. Exploration, mining, and refining projects require large capital investments and have long gestation periods.
4. Global prices and demand for critical minerals are highly volatile, which discourages private sector investments.
5. Mining activities often lead to environmental degradation and social conflicts with local communities.

### Strategies to Strengthen India's Critical Mineral Supply Chain

1. The government should invest in developing domestic mining and refining infrastructure to create a complete value chain within the country.
2. Policy incentives such as concessional loans, production tax credits, and financial support for refinery construction should be provided to attract private sector investment.
3. The government can introduce revenue stabilization mechanisms such as contracts for difference and demand guarantees to reduce investment risks.
4. Artificial intelligence-based geological exploration should be promoted to improve mineral discovery rates and reduce exploration costs.
5. India should strengthen international partnerships and acquire mineral assets abroad to diversify supply sources.
6. Local communities should be encouraged to participate as stakeholders or co-investors in mining projects to ensure social acceptance.
7. Strong environmental and social safeguards should be implemented to ensure sustainable and responsible mining practices.

**Conclusion:** Securing critical minerals is essential for India's green transition, technological advancement, and strategic autonomy. A coordinated approach involving government support, private sector participation,

technological innovation, and international cooperation will be crucial for building a resilient and sustainable critical mineral supply chain.

**Question:** Discuss the importance of securing critical minerals for India and suggest strategies to strengthen India's critical mineral supply chain.

**Source:** BusinessLine

### Protecting Women's Rights Amid Conflict and Instability

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

#### Introduction

International Women's Day, observed globally on **March 8**, highlights the struggle for gender equality and women's rights. The **2026 theme** — "**Rights, Justice, Action: For All Women and Girls**" stresses the need for real progress. However, the world today faces growing conflicts, displacement, and instability. These crises increase violence, insecurity, and inequality for women and girls, making the protection of their rights a pressing global concern.

#### Global Conflicts and the Growing Vulnerability of Women

- 1. Rising global conflicts and instability:** Several regions of the world are facing armed conflicts and wars. These conflicts cause destruction of infrastructure, displacement of communities, and large numbers of civilian deaths, including many women and children.
- 2. Women and children as the most vulnerable:** Research and field studies show that **women and girls suffer disproportionately in wars** due to insecurity, displacement, economic collapse, and weakening of social protection systems.
- 3. Conflict intensifying existing gender inequalities:** Conflicts worsen pre-existing discrimination against women. Political instability and weak institutions reduce the capacity of states to protect women's rights.
- 4. Sexual violence used as a weapon of war: Rape and sexual violence have historically been used during wars to humiliate and subjugate the enemy,** making women deliberate targets in many conflicts.
- 5. Psychological trauma among affected women:** Women living in conflict zones frequently experience **depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** due to violence, displacement, and loss of family and livelihood.

#### Impacts of Conflict on Women and Girls

- 1. Rise in gender-based violence:** Armed conflicts significantly increase **gender-based violence**, including arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence, and forced marriages.
- 2. Sexual violence as a deliberate tactic:** Sexual violence is often used systematically during conflicts. Women and girls are the primary victims, although men and boys can also face sexual violence, especially in detention contexts.

3. **Breakdown of rule of law and social structures:** Post-conflict societies often face increased violence because law enforcement weakens and weapons circulate widely. This situation normalizes violence and deepens discrimination.

4. **Trafficking and exploitation during conflicts:** The collapse of political and economic systems increases **trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced labour**, particularly affecting women and girls.

5. **Disruption of essential services:** Conflicts disrupt **health care, education, and social support systems**, which has a severe and disproportionate impact on women and girls.

6. **Barriers to education for girls:** Fear of attacks and security threats prevent many girls from attending school. Many also assume caregiving responsibilities during crises.

7. **Health risks and reproductive challenges:** Disruption of **sexual and reproductive health services** increases risks of maternal mortality, severe injuries, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections.

8. **Economic insecurity and loss of livelihood:** Women often lose employment opportunities, land, and productive assets during conflicts. Many must find alternative sources of livelihood to support their families.

9. **Gender dimensions of internal displacement:** Internally displaced women often lose housing, land, and livestock. Lack of property titles further weakens their economic security.

10. **Increased risks for displaced women:** Internally displaced women face **sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced recruitment, labour exploitation, and lack of reproductive health services**.

11. **Exclusion from decision-making:** Women and girls in displacement settings are often excluded from decisions related to relief distribution and community governance.

### International Frameworks for Protecting Women in Conflict

#### 1. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) :

- **Foundation of the framework:** The **United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000**, forming the central international framework on **Women, Peace and Security**, which calls for protecting women during conflicts and ensuring their active participation in peacebuilding and decision-making.
- **Core framework principles of Resolution 1325:** The framework emphasises **women's participation in peace processes, gender perspectives in peacekeeping training, and gender mainstreaming in UN peace and security reporting systems**.

#### 2. Strengthening the framework through later resolutions:

- **Resolution 1820 (2008):** Addressed sexual violence in conflict.
- **Resolutions 1888, 1889, 1960:** Created institutional mechanisms such as the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Women's Protection Advisers, and monitoring systems.

- **Resolution 2242 (2015):** Linked sexual violence with terrorism.
- **Resolution 2331 (2016):** Highlighted links between trafficking, sexual violence, and organised crime.
- **Resolution 2467 (2019):** Promoted a survivor-centred approach and called for survivor support funds.

3. Additionally, the **Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** provides the human rights foundation for the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

### What Should Be Done

1. **Equal participation in peace negotiations:** Women must be included in peace talks, conflict prevention, and reconstruction processes because their participation makes peace agreements more durable.
2. **Stronger action by women's collectives and global institutions:** Women's organisations and international bodies should focus on concrete action rather than limiting efforts to conferences and slogans.
3. **Protection from violence and exploitation:** Women and children in conflict zones require stronger protection from **sexual violence, trafficking, and exploitation.**
4. **Ensuring access to essential services:** Providing **food, health care, education, financial assistance, and emotional support** is necessary to protect the rights and dignity of women affected by conflict.
5. **Recognising women as active peacebuilders:** Women have historically acted as **civil society leaders, human rights defenders, and participants in peacebuilding processes.**
6. **Using post-conflict recovery as an opportunity for reform:** Post-conflict reconstruction can transform social structures and norms, creating opportunities to strengthen women's human rights.

### Conclusion

Protecting women's rights in conflict situations remains a critical global challenge. Wars intensify violence, displacement, and inequality for women and girls. Despite strong international frameworks, implementation gaps persist. Ensuring women's meaningful participation in peace processes and strengthening protection mechanisms are essential for achieving justice, equality, and lasting peace in conflict-affected societies.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how global conflicts and instability affect women's rights and living conditions, and examine the international frameworks and measures needed to protect women in conflict situations.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Is the Supreme Court doing enough to tackle hate speech?

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant

provisions and basic structure.

## Introduction

Debate has intensified over whether the Supreme Court is doing enough to address hate speech. The issue resurfaced after petitions against Assam Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** were redirected by the Court to the Gauhati High Court. Earlier, the Court also indicated that pending hate speech cases may be closed. These developments have raised questions about judicial responsibility, enforcement failures, and the broader legal framework needed to tackle hate speech effectively.

## What is Hate Speech?

**1. Law Commission's description of hate speech:** The **Law Commission of India (267th Report)** describes hate speech as words, signs, or expressions that incite hatred against groups based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or other identities.

**2. Indirect and subtle nature of hate speech:** Hate speech often does not openly call for violence. It may appear as prejudicial discourse that gradually marginalises communities.

**3. Role of ambiguity and perception:** Hate speech sometimes appears as “dog whistles”, where statements are deliberately ambiguous. Speakers can deny harmful intent while still sending divisive signals.

**4. Link with social power structures:** The harm of hate speech depends not only on words but also on social hierarchies. It often targets communities that are already socially or politically vulnerable.

**5. Impact on democracy:** Hate speech deepens democratic deficits by reinforcing exclusion and discrimination against weaker groups.

## Existing Legal Framework on Hate Speech in India

### 1. Constitutional basis of regulating hate speech

a. **Freedom of speech and its limits:** The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech under **Article 19(1)(a)**, but this freedom is not absolute.

b. **Reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2):** The State can impose restrictions on speech to protect public order, morality, and other constitutional values. Hate speech is treated as a limitation on free speech because it can promote hatred, violence, and social disharmony.

### 2. Penal Provisions Addressing Hate Speech

a. **Indian Penal Code provisions:** Hate speech is mainly addressed through **Section 153A and Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code**.

b. **Section 153A – Promotion of enmity between groups:** This provision punishes acts that promote enmity between groups on grounds such as religion, race, language, residence, or place of birth.

**c. Punishment under Section 153A:** The offence carries imprisonment up to **three years**, which may extend to **five years if committed in a place of worship or religious assembly**.

**d. Section 505 – Statements causing public mischief:** This section criminalises statements, rumours, or reports that create fear, encourage offences against the state, or incite communities against each other.

**e. Punishment under Section 505:** The offence carries imprisonment up to **three years**, which may extend to **five years when committed in religious gatherings or places of worship**.

### 3. Election Law Provisions

**a. Role of election law in regulating hate speech:** The **Representation of the People Act, 1950** empowers the **Election Commission of India** to act against candidates who use hate speech during election campaigns.

### Supreme Court's Interventions

#### 1. Preventive framework against hate crimes

**Tehseen Poonawalla v. Union of India (2018):**

- **Guidelines to curb mob lynching and hate crimes:** The Supreme Court issued detailed directions to prevent mob lynching and related hate crimes and required States to appoint **nodal officers** to monitor such incidents.
- **Administrative responsibility for enforcement:** These nodal officers were tasked with preventing hate crimes and ensuring **prompt registration of offences by police authorities**.

#### 2. Judicial concern over rising hate speech (2022)

- **Recognition of a climate of hate:** The Court observed that a **"climate of hate prevails in the country"** and criticised the increasing misuse of religion in public discourse.
- **Direction for suo motu FIR registration (October 21, 2022):** Police authorities were directed to **register FIRs on their own in hate speech cases** without waiting for formal complaints.

### Limitations of the Supreme Court's Approach

#### 1. Weak implementation of judicial directions

- **Failure of enforcement by authorities:** Despite Supreme Court directives, hate speech incidents continue and authorities often fail to register FIRs or invoke appropriate legal provisions.
- **Reluctance to act against influential individuals:** Law enforcement agencies sometimes hesitate to proceed against persons who hold power or influence.

#### 2. Limited judicial monitoring of compliance

- **Closure of long-pending petitions:** The Court indicated that hate speech cases pending since **2021 may be closed**, while allowing petitioners to seek remedies in High Courts.

- **Example reflecting judicial restraint:** In the case concerning alleged communal remarks by **Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma**, the Court directed petitioners to approach the **Gauhati High Court**.

### 3. Reluctance to use stronger constitutional powers

- **Limited use of Article 142:** Critics argue that the Court has not consistently used its powers under **Article 142** to enforce compliance or ensure stronger action.

- **Absence of contempt proceedings:** Some observers believe the Court could initiate **contempt proceedings** against officials who fail to implement its directives.

## Recent Developments and Proposed Reforms

### 1. Recent Developments

#### a. Demand to recognise hate speech as a constitutional tort:

- Activists have urged the Court to treat hate speech as a **constitutional tort**, meaning the State can be held liable for violations of constitutional rights.

- **Meaning of constitutional tort:** It allows courts to hold the State responsible for the actions or inaction of its officials when constitutional guarantees are violated.

b. **Argument for greater accountability:** If authorities fail to prevent hate speech, the State could be required to compensate victims and acknowledge its failure.

### 2. Proposals for Stronger Criminal Provisions

a. **Law Commission recommendations:** The **267th Report (2017)** proposed adding two new penal provisions to address hate speech more clearly.

b. **Proposed Section 153C:** This section would punish threatening words or signs intended to cause fear or incite violence against groups based on religion, caste, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, or disability.

c. **Proposed Section 505A:** This section would criminalise threatening or derogatory expressions intended to provoke unlawful violence.

d. **Recommended punishments:** The proposals suggest imprisonment of up to **two years for Section 153C** and **one year for Section 505A**, along with fines.

e. **Committee recommendations for reform:** The **M.P. Bezbaruah Committee** and **T.K. Viswanathan Committee** also supported stronger provisions against hate speech.

### 3. Legislative Initiative at the State Level

a. **Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes Bill, 2025:** This proposed legislation seeks to create a dedicated legal framework to address hate speech and related crimes.

b. **Concerns about the proposed bill:** Critics argue the bill focuses mainly on injury or disharmony and does not sufficiently address structural discrimination caused by hate speech.

c. **Conceptual gaps in the bill:** Some definitions are considered broad and may lead to arbitrary application. These issues may require amendments after implementation.

### What Should Be Done

1. **Effective enforcement of existing laws:** Legal provisions already exist, but authorities often fail to apply them consistently.

2. **Accountability of state authorities:** Police and investigating agencies must act promptly and register cases without delay.

3. **Stronger judicial monitoring:** Courts may need to supervise compliance with their directions to ensure implementation.

4. **Addressing institutional inaction:** Bodies such as the **Election Commission** must exercise their powers when hate speech occurs during elections.

5. **Regulation of media amplification:** Hate speech often spreads quickly through media platforms. Mechanisms are required to prevent media systems from amplifying or commercialising such speech.

6. **Need for broader social consensus:** Legal measures alone cannot solve the problem. Society must resist stereotypes, propaganda, and divisive narratives that target vulnerable communities.

### Conclusion

Hate speech challenges constitutional equality, social harmony, and democratic values. The Supreme Court has issued important directions, but weak enforcement and institutional inaction limit their impact. Addressing the problem requires stronger implementation of laws, judicial oversight, accountability of authorities, and wider social resistance to divisive rhetoric that marginalises vulnerable communities.

### Question for practice:

Examine the nature of hate speech in India and evaluate the effectiveness of the Supreme Court's interventions in addressing it.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### India's Digital Public Infrastructure

Source: The post "India's Digital Public Infrastructure" has been created, based on "India's Digital Public Infrastructure" published in "PIB" on 07th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science and Technology

**Context:** Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to **foundational digital systems that enable secure and seamless interaction between citizens, businesses and governments**. India has developed one of the **largest population-scale DPI ecosystems** by integrating digital identity, financial inclusion and connectivity, thereby transforming governance, welfare delivery and economic activity.

### Evolution of India's DPI Ecosystem

- I. Foundations through the JAM Trinity**
  - a. The **JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile)** created the foundational layer of India's DPI architecture.
  - b. **Aadhaar** provided a **biometric digital identity system**, with more than **144 crore Aadhaar numbers generated** and over **2707 crore authentication transactions in 2024–25**, enabling secure and portable identity verification.
  - c. **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** expanded financial inclusion by increasing bank accounts from **14.72 crore in 2015 to 57.71 crore in 2026**, while deposits rose to **₹2.94 lakh crore**.
  - d. Rapid growth in **mobile connectivity**, with **85.5% households owning smartphones and 125.87 crore wireless subscribers**, ensured widespread access to digital services.
- II. Development of the India Stack:** India built an **interoperable digital architecture using open APIs**, enabling seamless integration of multiple services.
- III. Digital Economic Infrastructure**
  - a. **UPI** enabled instant digital payments and processed **21.7 billion transactions worth ₹28.33 lakh crore in January 2026**, making it the world's largest real-time payment system.
  - b. **Public Financial Management System (PFMS)** improved transparency in government spending and enabled Direct Benefit Transfer, leading to **savings of over ₹4.31 lakh crore between 2015 and 2024**.
  - c. **ONDC** democratised e-commerce by connecting buyers and sellers through open networks, with **1.16 lakh sellers across 630+ cities**.
  - d. **Government eMarketplace (GeM)** digitised public procurement and processed **3.27 crore orders worth ₹16.41 lakh crore**.
- IV. Citizen Service Delivery Platforms**
  - a. **DigiLocker** provides a digital document wallet with **67.63 crore users and over 950 crore documents issued**.
  - b. **UMANG** offers access to **2400+ government services** through a single mobile platform.
  - c. **e-Courts** have improved transparency and accessibility through ICT-enabled judicial services.
- V. Health and Nutrition Platforms**
  - a. **CoWIN** managed over **220 crore COVID-19 vaccination doses** through real-time digital tracking.
  - b. **eSanjeevani** expanded telemedicine and has served **45.42 crore patients**.
  - c. Platforms such as **Aarogya Setu, NCD portal and POSHAN Tracker** support digital health monitoring and nutrition management.
- VI. Education and Skilling Platforms**
  - a. **DIKSHA** supports digital learning and has delivered **566 crore learning sessions**.
  - b. **Skill India Digital Hub** integrates training, certification and employment services.
- VII. Governance and Coordination Systems**
  - a. **e-Office** enables paperless governance and faster administrative decision-making.
  - b. **API Setu** facilitates secure data exchange with **over 8,000 APIs**.
  - c. **PM GatiShakti** supports integrated infrastructure planning through a GIS-based digital platform.

### Challenges in India's DPI Ecosystem

1. **Digital divide** continues to limit access for populations lacking digital literacy or reliable internet connectivity.
2. **Data privacy and cybersecurity concerns** arise due to the large volume of sensitive personal information processed through digital platforms.
3. **Institutional capacity constraints** at state and local levels sometimes hinder effective implementation of digital systems.
4. **Interoperability and coordination challenges** may occur when integrating multiple platforms across sectors and departments.
5. **Exclusion risks** may arise if authentication failures or technical errors prevent beneficiaries from accessing essential services.

#### Way Forward

1. The government should **strengthen digital infrastructure in rural and remote regions** to reduce the digital divide.
2. Robust **data protection frameworks and cybersecurity mechanisms** should be implemented to ensure privacy and trust.
3. **Capacity building of government officials and digital literacy programs for citizens** should be expanded.
4. Greater emphasis should be placed on **interoperability standards and open digital ecosystems** to ensure seamless integration.
5. Systems should incorporate **offline and assisted service delivery mechanisms** to prevent exclusion of vulnerable groups.

**Conclusion:** India's Digital Public Infrastructure demonstrates that **technology can be designed as a public good to promote inclusive development and efficient governance**. By integrating identity, payments and service delivery at a population scale, India has created a **globally relevant model for digital transformation**, although continued reforms are necessary to address challenges and ensure equitable access.

**Question:** Discuss the evolution of India's DPI ecosystem. Also examine the challenges associated with it and suggest measures to address them.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

### Key Interventions for Women's Economic Advancement

**Source:** The post "Key Interventions for Women's Economic Advancement" has been created, based on "Key Interventions for Women's Economic Advancement" published in "PIB" on 07th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** Women's economic empowerment is essential for **inclusive growth, poverty reduction and social development**. Over the past decade, India has adopted a **women-centric development approach**, focusing on improving women's access to **skills, credit, markets, technology and financial services** through various targeted schemes.

#### Key Interventions for Women's Economic Advancement

##### 1. Financial Security for the Girl Child

- a. **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)** was launched in 2015 under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign to encourage savings for the education and future needs of the girl child.

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- b. The scheme provides an **interest rate of 8.2% per annum with tax benefits under Section 80C**.
- c. Deposits can be made from **₹250 up to ₹1.5 lakh annually**, and the account matures after **21 years**.
- d. As of **December 2025**, **total deposits exceeded ₹3.33 lakh crore**, promoting long-term financial security for girls.

## 2. Rural Livelihoods and Collective Empowerment

- a. **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)** mobilises rural women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and provides **credit, skill training and enterprise support**.
- b. Over **10.05 crore women have been organised into 90.9 lakh SHGs**, forming one of the world's largest women-led community networks.
- c. The scheme also deploys **Bank Sakhis, Krishi Sakhis and Pashu Sakhis** to strengthen financial access and agricultural productivity.
- d. **Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)** has supported **5.88 lakh rural enterprises**.

## 3. Technology-led Empowerment

- a. **NaMo Drone Didi Yojana** equips women SHGs with drones for agricultural services such as spraying fertilisers and pesticides.
- b. The scheme provides **80% central financial assistance up to ₹8 lakh** and specialised training for drone operation and maintenance.
- c. It improves farm productivity while creating **new income opportunities for rural women**.

## 4. Promotion of Women Entrepreneurship

- a. **Lakhpati Didi Scheme** aims to ensure that SHG members earn **over ₹1 lakh annually through sustainable livelihood activities**, with a target of **6 crore Lakhpati Didis**.
- b. **SHE-Mart**, announced in the Union Budget 2026-27, will establish **community-owned retail outlets in every district** to market products made by women SHGs.
- c. **Womaniya Initiative under Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** promotes women-led enterprises in public procurement, with **over 2 lakh women-led MSEs registered and orders worth more than ₹80,000 crore secured**.

## 5. Financial Inclusion and Credit Support

- a. **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)** provides **collateral-free loans up to ₹20 lakh**, enabling women to start or expand micro-enterprises.
- b. **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)** has enabled millions of women to open **zero-balance bank accounts**, facilitating direct benefit transfers and financial independence.
- c. **PM SVANidhi Scheme** provides **working capital loans to street vendors**, including women, with interest subsidies and digital incentives.
- d. **Stand-Up India Scheme** provides **loans from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore** to women entrepreneurs to establish enterprises in manufacturing, services and trading sectors.

## Challenges

1. **Low female labour force participation** despite increasing financial inclusion.
2. **Limited digital literacy and access to technology** in rural areas.
3. **Socio-cultural barriers and gender norms** that restrict women's participation in economic activities.
4. **Limited access to markets and value chains** for women-led enterprises.

5. **Credit access gaps and lack of collateral** for women entrepreneurs.

#### Way Forward

1. The government should **strengthen digital literacy and skill development programmes for women.**
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on **market linkages, value addition and supply chain integration for women-led enterprises.**
3. Financial institutions should **expand gender-sensitive credit policies and mentoring support** for women entrepreneurs.
4. There should be **greater convergence between SHGs, digital platforms and government procurement systems.**
5. Awareness campaigns should address **social barriers and encourage women's participation in economic activities.**

**Conclusion:** India's approach to women's empowerment has evolved from **financial inclusion to entrepreneurship and leadership.** Through schemes promoting savings, livelihoods, technology adoption and entrepreneurship, women are increasingly becoming **drivers of household prosperity and national development,** strengthening the vision of **Viksit Bharat by 2047.**

**Question:** Discuss the key government interventions for women's economic advancement in India. Highlight the challenges and suggest measures for improvement.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

### **Rights, justice, action for India's women farmers**

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 1-** Role of women and women's organisation **And Gs Paper 3-** Agriculture

#### Introduction

International Women's Day on **March 8, 2026** calls for **equal rights and equal justice for women and girls.** The theme gains importance as **2026 is observed as the International Year of the Woman Farmer.** Although legal reforms such as **equal inheritance rights for daughters** exist, women farmers still face exclusion from land ownership, agricultural recognition, and access to institutional resources in India's agri-food systems.

#### Structural Exclusion of Women in Agriculture

1. **Land ownership concentrated in men's names:** Land and property in most rural households remain **registered in men's names,** despite legal reforms supporting daughters' inheritance rights.
2. **Social and legal barriers to women's land records: Patrilineal inheritance, social norms, limited legal awareness, and administrative hurdles** prevent women's names from appearing in land records.
3. **Lack of legal status as farmers:** Many women manage cultivation and deal with labourers and input dealers, yet they lack **legal recognition as farmers because land titles are absent.**

**4. Exclusion from institutional agricultural support:** Without land titles, women face barriers in accessing institutional credit, crop insurance, irrigation schemes, agricultural extension services, and climate-resilient technologies.

**5. Invisible contribution to agri-food systems:** Women contribute significantly to farming, yet **their access to and control over cultivable land remains abysmally low**, making their labour undervalued.

### Consequences of the Exclusion of Women Farmers in Agriculture

**1. Feminisation of agriculture due to male migration:** As men migrate for work, agriculture is increasingly “feminised,” with women taking responsibility for cultivation, risk management, and household food provisioning.

**2. Heavy workload without support systems:** Women face **high agricultural workloads, limited drudgery-reduction technologies, and absence of supportive care systems**, forcing them to balance farm work and household duties.

**3. Health problems from excessive work burden:** **Resource-poor women with heavy workloads experience serious health issues and micronutrient deficiencies**, especially during peak agricultural seasons.

**4. High malnutrition and anaemia among women:** India continues to face **persistently high anaemia rates among women of reproductive age**, along with widespread micronutrient deficiencies.

**5. Intergenerational effects on children:** **Maternal undernutrition and anaemia contribute to low birth weight, stunting, and impaired child development**, affecting the health of future generations.

**6. Low dietary diversity in rural households:** Rural diets remain **cereal-heavy and low in pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source foods**, despite women’s role in producing food.

### Limitations of Existing Food Security and Agricultural Policies

**1. National Food Security Act framework:** India’s right-to-food framework is anchored in the **National Food Security Act**, which guarantees **subsidised cereals, supplementary nutrition, and maternity entitlements**.

**2. Uneven improvement in women’s nutrition:** Several States introduced **millets, local foods, and fortified staples**, yet **women’s nutrition outcomes remain uneven and anaemia trends remain worrying**.

**3. Cereal-centric food distribution systems:** Food transfers through the **Public Distribution System remain largely cereal-focused**, with uneven inclusion of pulses, millets, and nutrient-dense foods.

**4. Overburdened frontline workers affecting programme quality:** Heavy responsibilities on frontline workers reduce **programme effectiveness and community awareness about nutrition and entitlements**.

**5. Digitalisation creating exclusion risks:** Digital systems improve efficiency but exclude women who lack **connectivity, documentation, or digital skills**, limiting their ability to claim benefits.

### Way Forward

The **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)** and the **World Food Programme (WFP)** highlight some urgent priorities to ensure meaningful action for women farmers.

**1. Visibility of women farmers in law, data, and policy: Gender-disaggregated agricultural data and the National Policy for Farmers' definition of farmers based on activities rather than land ownership** can recognise women landowners, tenants, labourers, and forest gatherers.

**2. Strengthening land and productive resource rights: Equal inheritance implementation, joint spousal land titles, and incentives for registering land or housing in women's names** can improve women's control over assets.

**3. Women's participation in resource governance:** Women should have stronger roles in **managing common lands and water resources**, while collective platforms can increase bargaining power.

**4. Aligning food systems with nutrition objectives:** Public procurement and support policies should encourage **nutri-cereals, pulses, fruits, and vegetables**, and distribute them through **Public Distribution Systems, Anganwadis, and school meals**.

**5. Community-based nutrition and food initiatives: Kitchen gardens, women's seed banks, and localised food planning** can strengthen women's role in improving diets and farming practices.

**6. Access to technology and extension services: Labour-saving tools, agricultural training, and market information** can reduce drudgery, improve productivity, and support sustainable farming decisions.

## Conclusion

Ensuring **rights, justice, and action for women farmers** requires recognising them as farmers and strengthening access to **land, productive resources, technologies, and nutrition systems**. Empowered women farmers can influence agricultural practices, improve food security, and strengthen community well-being. Supporting their agency can promote **climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture** across India.

## Question for practice:

Discuss the structural challenges faced by women farmers in India and explain the measures needed to ensure rights, justice, and action for them in agri-food systems.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## The chokepoint that cannot be routed around

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

## Introduction

The crisis around the **Strait of Hormuz** reveals a deeper weakness in global trade systems. Earlier disruptions exposed **supply chain fragility** and encouraged redundancy in suppliers and logistics. However, the current situation shows that some constraints arise from **geography and institutions** rather than logistics. Strategic

passages such as **Hormuz cannot be easily bypassed**, making them critical points of vulnerability for **global energy flows**.

### The Earlier Crisis of Supply Chain Disruption in the Suez Canal

1. **Blockage of a critical trade route:** In **March 2021**, the **MV Ever Given**, a **400-metre ship**, ran aground in the **205-metre-wide Suez Canal** and blocked the route for six days, halting about **\$9.6 billion in daily trade**.
2. **Recognition of supply chain fragility:** The disruption highlighted the risks of **thin margins and fragile logistics networks**, triggering a large debate on **supply chain resilience**.
3. **Policy emphasis on redundancy:** The key lesson was that **global trade requires redundancy**, including **diversified suppliers, larger inventories, and stronger logistics capacity**.
4. **Economic nature of the crisis:** The **2020–22 supply chain crisis** emerged from logistical limits at **ports, semiconductor factories, and container terminals**, where **demand exceeded capacity**.
5. **Market adjustment as the solution:** **Higher prices encouraged more ships, increased production, and rerouting of trade flows**, helping markets stabilise within **about 18 months**.

### The Present Crisis of Energy Disruption in the Strait of Hormuz

1. **Strategic energy passage:** The **Strait of Hormuz**, about **21 miles wide**, bordered by **Iran on the northern shore**, functions as a crucial route for **global oil and petroleum flows**.
2. **Sharp fall in vessel movement:**
  - By **March 3**, Automatic Identification System (AIS) tracking recorded only **nine vessels** navigating the strait compared with a **February daily average of 135 ships**.
  - The number of vessels fell from **91 on February 28** to **26 on March 1**, showing a **near-vertical collapse in movement**.
3. **Insurance-triggered disruption:** **Seven members of the International Group of Protection and Indemnity Clubs** issued **72-hour cancellation notices**, soon followed by **all twelve members**.
4. **Commercial withdrawal of shipping:** Once **insurance cover disappeared**, shipowners chose to **wait rather than enter the strait**, effectively halting traffic **even without a physical blockade**.

### The Structural Difference Between Supply Chain Bottlenecks and Energy Chokepoints

1. **Insurance acting as the first chokepoint:** The disruption occurred **before any physical closure**, as **insurance withdrawal became the immediate barrier**.
2. **Geographical limitation of the passage:** The **Strait of Hormuz cannot be widened or duplicated**, making it a **fixed physical constraint** unlike flexible supply chains.
3. **Limited substitute routes:** Existing pipelines from the Gulf can redirect only about **4.2 million barrels per day**, while the strait normally carries **around 20 million barrels daily**.

**4. Absence of bypass for LNG exports:** Qatar's LNG, accounting for **19% of global supply**, has **no alternative route**, reinforcing the strait's central importance.

**5. Evidence from emergency adjustments:** Saudi Arabia redirected oil to Yanbu, loading **2.44 million barrels per day** against a **six-month average of under one million**, showing both the **workaround and its ceiling**.

**6. Rapid cascading effects in energy systems:** Iraq's Rumaila field cut production by **1.5 million barrels per day** because **storage filled and exports could not move**.

### **The Economic Consequences of Disruption in the Strait of Hormuz**

**1. Impact on price discovery systems:** S&P Global's Platts excluded Dubai, Upper Zakum, Al-Shaheen, and Murban loadings from the price-discovery process, disrupting the benchmark system used for pricing Middle Eastern crude sold to Asian buyers.

**2. Importance of the Dubai benchmark:** The Dubai marker serves as the reference price for most Middle Eastern crude sold to Asian buyers.

**3. Rising price premiums in trading:** By March 4, TotalEnergies bid **\$12 above the benchmark**, compared with a premium of **\$1** in the previous week.

**4. Projected oil price increases:** Goldman Sachs scenarios estimate that a **one-month full closure could add \$15 to oil prices**, while **full pipeline use could limit the rise to \$12**.

**5. Market already pricing risk:** By March 3, oil markets had already incorporated a **\$14 risk premium**, close to the **full-closure scenario**.

**6. Potential natural gas price surge:** A two-month LNG disruption could push European benchmark gas prices (Dutch TTF) above **€100 per megawatt hour**, compared with **€31.6** before the war.

**7. Limited supply response from shale:** The International Energy Agency estimates that US shale could add **400,000 barrels per day**, far below the possible **16 million barrel per day shortfall**.

### **India's Strategic Exposure to the Hormuz Energy Chokepoint**

**1. Dependence on the Hormuz route:** Around **four to five million barrels** of India's daily hydrocarbon imports pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**.

**2. Limits of supplier diversification:** India has diversified oil suppliers to ensure availability and affordability. However, **about 4–5 million barrels** of its daily hydrocarbon imports still pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**, so the **maritime chokepoint risk remains unchanged**.

**3. Institutional vulnerability in maritime insurance:** India does not have its own **Shipping Protection and Indemnity Clubs**, which play a **central role in maritime insurance**.

**4. Global concentration of insurance institutions:** Most P&I clubs are located in **London and Europe**, giving them **significant influence over global shipping operations**.

**5. Delayed institutional response:** The Finance Minister acknowledged the need for an Indian P&I entity three years ago, but the institution has not yet been created.

### Conclusion

Recent crises reveal a shift in the nature of global vulnerabilities. Earlier disruptions centred on **supply chain nodes** such as **ports and factories**, encouraging redundancy and diversification. The **Hormuz crisis shows that strategic passages matter more. Geography, insurance systems, and pricing institutions** shape global energy flows. Resilience must address **critical maritime chokepoints**, not only supply chain networks.

### Question for practice:

Examine how the Strait of Hormuz crisis reveals the limitations of supply chain resilience strategies developed after the Suez Canal disruption.

Source: Businessline

### The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges

Source: The post “The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges” has been created, based on “The new Canada-India economic alignment emerges” published in “The Hindu” on 09th March 2026.

### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations

**Context:** The recent visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India and discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi signal a reset in bilateral relations. The signing of the **Terms of Reference** to relaunch negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) reflects a renewed focus on economic cooperation and strategic partnership.

### Key Opportunities in India–Canada Economic Relations

- 1. Energy and Critical Minerals Cooperation:** Canada is a major supplier of **oil, natural gas, uranium, and critical minerals** required for electric vehicles and advanced manufacturing. The **Canadian \$2.6-billion uranium supply agreement** between India and Cameco strengthens nuclear energy collaboration.
- 2. Technology and Innovation:** Canada hosts advanced **AI research clusters and innovation ecosystems**. Indian IT firms such as HCL Technologies are expanding their footprint in Canada.
- 3. Infrastructure and Investment:** Canadian institutional investors like Brookfield Corporation and Fairfax Financial Holdings have invested heavily in India’s telecom, infrastructure, and renewable energy sectors.
- 4. Agriculture and Food Security:** Canada’s agri-food exports can support India’s growing demand for sustainable food supplies.
- 5. Financial Services Collaboration:** Joint ventures such as Sun Life Financial–Aditya Birla Capital demonstrate the success of long-term financial partnerships.

### Challenges in India–Canada Economic Relations

**1. Diplomatic and Political Tensions:** Past disagreements over political issues and diaspora politics have periodically strained relations, affecting trust and economic engagement.

**2. Slow Progress in Trade Negotiations:** The CEPA negotiations have faced delays due to **differences over market access, labour mobility, and regulatory standards.**

**3. Regulatory and Market Barriers:** Businesses often encounter **complex regulatory frameworks, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers,** which limit trade expansion.

**4. Investment Risks and Policy Uncertainty:** Investors require **policy stability and transparent dispute resolution mechanisms** to sustain long-term investments.

**5. Geopolitical and Strategic Constraints:** Canada's balancing of relations with Western allies and India's strategic autonomy sometimes create differing policy priorities.

### Way Forward

**1. Fast-track CEPA Negotiations:** Finalising CEPA can reduce tariffs, improve market access, and provide a rules-based trade framework.

**2. Institutionalise Strategic Dialogue:** Establish regular high-level economic and trade dialogues to manage political differences and maintain momentum.

**3. Promote Sector-Specific Partnerships:** Focus cooperation on **critical minerals, clean energy, AI, infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing.**

**4. Facilitate Investment and Business Mobility:** Simplify regulatory procedures and improve **visa and labour mobility arrangements** for professionals.

**5. Strengthen People-to-People and Academic Links:** Expanding education, research, and innovation partnerships will build long-term trust and economic collaboration.

**Conclusion:** The renewed political commitment between India and Canada presents a crucial opportunity to strengthen economic ties. By addressing diplomatic sensitivities and accelerating trade and investment cooperation, the partnership can evolve into a **mutually beneficial strategic economic relationship linking India with North American markets.**

**Question:** The renewed economic engagement between India and Canada represents a strategic shift driven by mutual economic opportunities. Discuss the significance of the recent visit of Mark Carney to India and evaluate the opportunities, challenges, and way forward in India–Canada economic relations.  
Source: [The Hindu](#)

### India's new waste management rules face old implementation gaps

**Source:** The post "India's new waste management rules face old implementation gaps" has been created, based on "India's new waste management rules face old implementation gaps" published in "Mongabay" on 09th March 2026.

### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

**Context:** India notified the **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026**, replacing the earlier framework to improve segregation, accountability, and waste processing. Despite progressive provisions, weak enforcement and institutional constraints continue to hinder effective waste management in cities like Delhi.

### Key Provisions of SWM Rules 2026

- 1. Four-way Waste Segregation:** Waste must now be segregated into **dry, wet, sanitary, and special care waste** (e.g., medicines, paint cans, bulbs).
- 2. Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR):** It applies to generators producing **>100 kg waste/day**, occupying **>20,000 sq m**, or using **>40,000 litres of water/day**. There is mandatory **on-site treatment of wet waste** or certified disposal.
- 3. Restrictions on Landfill Dumping:** Only **non-recyclable and inert waste** allowed in landfills. Higher landfill fees for **unsegregated waste**.
- 4. Legacy Waste Management:** Mandatory **mapping of dumpsites** and time-bound **biomining and bioremediation**.
- 5. Digital Monitoring System:** Creation of a **centralised portal** to track waste generation, transportation, processing and disposal.

### Key Challenges

- 1. Weak Enforcement by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):** Municipal capacity remains limited, resulting in **mixed waste reaching landfills**.
- 2. Poor Segregation at Source:** Public participation is inadequate, and waste collectors often **remix segregated waste**, eroding trust.
- 3. Legacy Landfill Crisis:** Large dumps such as **Ghazipur Landfill, Bhalaswa Landfill, and Okhla Landfill** continue to release methane and pollutants.
- 4. Pollution from Waste-to-Energy Plants:** Incinerators have been linked with emissions of **toxic substances such as dioxins and furans**.
- 5. Institutional and Financial Constraints:** Limited municipal budgets and **poor fee collection systems** weaken waste management infrastructure.
- 6. Environmental and Health Impacts:** Waste burning significantly contributes to **air pollution, methane emissions, and urban heat stress**.

### Way Forward

- 1. Strengthen Segregation at Source:** Mandatory household segregation with **strict penalties and incentives**.
- 2. Capacity Building of ULBs:** Improve funding, technical capacity, and accountability mechanisms.

**3. Decentralised Waste Processing:** Promote **composting, biomethanation, and material recovery facilities** at ward level.

**4. Integrate Informal Waste Sector:** Formal recognition and integration of **waste pickers into recycling systems**.

**5. Rationalise Waste-to-Energy Projects:** Limit WtE plants to **non-recyclable fractions only** and enforce strict emission standards.

**6. Public Awareness and Community Participation:** Partnerships with NGOs, RWAs, and local communities for behavioural change.

**Conclusion:** While the SWM Rules 2026 provide a stronger regulatory framework, their success depends on **effective enforcement, citizen participation, and decentralised waste processing**. Without addressing implementation gaps, India's waste crisis will continue to worsen urban pollution and public health risks.

**Question:** "India's new Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 aim to strengthen waste segregation and accountability. However, long-standing implementation gaps continue to undermine effective waste management in cities." Discuss.

Source: [Mongabay](#)

### **The Need to Recognise 'Volunteer' Care Work**

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2-** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health,

Education, Human Resources. .

#### **Introduction**

India's welfare system depends on millions of women who provide health, nutrition, and childcare services. The **Union Budget 2026-27 proposes training 1.5 lakh multiskilled caregivers under NSQF**, recognising the growing demand for care services. However, a major contradiction remains. **More than five million existing care workers such as ASHAs, Anganwadi workers and mid-day meal workers still remain classified as "volunteers"**. They deliver essential public services but lack formal wages, labour protections, and employment security.

#### **Background of Care Work**

**1. Central role in welfare delivery: ASHAs, Anganwadi workers and mid-day meal workers sustain India's welfare architecture** by delivering health, nutrition and childcare services in communities across the country.

**2. Institutional foundation of the workforce: Anganwadi workers operate under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)** to provide early childhood care and nutrition, while **ASHAs were created under the National Rural Health Mission in 2005** to connect communities with the public health system.

**3. Scale and presence of the workforce:** India has **over one million ASHA workers**, along with large numbers of Anganwadi workers and helpers, making the care workforce a major pillar of public welfare delivery.

**4. Range of responsibilities in public health:** Care workers **record birth and death data, support maternal and child health programmes, track communicable and non-communicable diseases, and monitor sanitation and hygiene in communities.**

**5. Evidence of their effectiveness:** ASHAs received the WHO Director-General's Global Health Leaders Award in 2022, and a PLOS Global Public Health study shows that women connected with ASHAs are 1.6 times more likely to access maternal health services and institutional delivery.

### Major Issues With Care Work

**1. Volunteer classification and lack of labour rights:** Care workers are officially treated as “volunteers” or “scheme workers”, which allows the state to avoid providing **formal wages, contracts, paid leave, or maternity benefits.**

**2. Low and uncertain income:** An ASHA worker earns roughly ₹5,000 to ₹15,000 per month, combining a small fixed payment with incentives linked to specific tasks such as facilitating institutional births.

**3. Gendered undervaluation of care work:** The 2024 Time Use Survey shows **41% of women aged 15–59 spend 140 minutes daily on caregiving compared to 21.4% of men at 74 minutes**, showing a strong gender imbalance in unpaid care work.

**4. Dependence on a feminised shadow labour force:** The welfare system depends on a **vast informal workforce of women delivering essential services while remaining outside formal employment protections.**

**5. Historical policy choices creating informality:** Under ICDS, the government denied Anganwadi workers formal worker status, laying the foundation for treating welfare workers as volunteers rather than employees.

**6. Legal decisions excluding employee status:** The **State of Karnataka vs Ameerbi (1996)** tribunal decision excluded Anganwadi workers from government employee status, reinforcing their informal classification.

**7. Ignored labour reform recommendations:** The **45th Labour Conference recommended regularisation, minimum wages, pensions and gratuity for ASHA workers**, but successive governments did not implement these proposals.

**8. Fiscal decisions worsening conditions:** The **ICDS budget cut in 2015 and the freezing of the Centre's honorarium contribution in 2018** reduced financial support and increased economic pressure on care workers.

**9. Regional inequality in compensation:** Since central payments stagnated, **States began topping up wages from their own budgets**, leading to major differences between wealthier and fiscally constrained States.

### Existing Policy Responses to Care Work Issues

- 1. Care economy expansion through training:** The Union Budget 2026–27 proposes training 1.5 lakh multiskilled caregivers under programmes aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) to strengthen the care ecosystem.
- 2. Limited welfare support schemes:** Care workers receive partial support through state honorarium increases, gratuity benefits, and inclusion in schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan.
- 3. Insurance protection for ASHA workers:** In 2018 the government introduced an ASHA benefit package covering accidents, deaths and disability, providing limited social security support.
- 4. Judicial recognition of permanent nature of work:** In *Dharam Singh & Anr. vs State of U.P. & Anr. (2025)* the Supreme Court held that **work that is recurrent and central to an institution cannot be treated as temporary indefinitely**, strengthening demands for regularisation.

### Way Forward

- 1. Legal reclassification of care workers:** The Centre should reclassify ASHAs and Anganwadi workers as statutory employees under the Code on Social Security, ensuring minimum wages, pensions and labour protections.
- 2. Transition from honorarium to formal wages:** Policy frameworks should convert honorarium-based payments into fair wages with formal employment contracts for long-term security.
- 3. Skill recognition for existing workers:** The NSQF training programmes should include ASHA and Anganwadi workers, recognising their existing skills and improving career security.
- 4. Reducing regional wage disparities:** The Centre and States must coordinate funding to ensure equitable pay across regions, reducing inequalities caused by varying State capacities.
- 5. Implementation of global labour standards:** Reforms should follow the International Labour Organisation's 5R Framework for Decent Care Work, particularly the commitments of Reward and Represent.

### Conclusion

India's health and welfare programmes rely heavily on millions of women who perform essential care services. Yet these workers remain **underpaid, informal and excluded from labour protections despite their critical role in public welfare delivery**. Recognising them as formal employees, ensuring fair wages and social security, and integrating them into skill programmes are essential steps for building a **stronger and more equitable care economy**.

### Question for practice:

Examine the challenges faced by 'volunteer' care workers such as ASHAs and Anganwadi workers in India, and discuss the measures required to recognise and strengthen their role in the country's care economy.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## One Nation, One Election — Remedy Worse Than Disease

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant

provisions and basic structure. **And** Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

### Introduction

The proposal of **One Nation, One Election** aims to hold Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections together to reduce expenditure and administrative disruption. However, comparative experience and constitutional principles raise serious concerns. The proposal may weaken parliamentary accountability, disturb federal balance, and create governance complications. The debate therefore centres on whether administrative convenience justifies altering key democratic safeguards.

### The One Nation, One Election Proposal

- 1. Constitutional Amendment Framework:** The proposal is based on the committee chaired by **Ram Nath Kovind** and introduced through the **Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024** to synchronise national and State elections.
- 2. Alignment of Legislative Tenures:** Proposed Article 82A empowers the President to notify an appointed date from which **all State Assembly terms align with the Lok Sabha cycle**, even if some Assemblies must end their tenure earlier than five years.
- 3. Unexpired-Term Elections Mechanism:** If a legislature dissolves before completing its tenure, the newly elected House will serve **only the remaining period of the original term**, rather than receiving a fresh five-year mandate.
- 4. Election Deferral Authority:** The proposal allows the **Election Commission of India to recommend deferring State elections** if simultaneous conduct is not feasible, while amendments are proposed to **Articles 83, 172 and 327** to enable the framework.

### Comparative Constitutional Experience

- 1. Independent Electoral Cycles in Federal Democracies:** Countries such as Canada conduct federal and provincial elections separately, showing that **federal systems often maintain different democratic rhythms across levels of government**.
- 2. Structural Limits in Australia:** Synchronisation is impossible because **State legislatures have fixed four-year terms while the federal House of Representatives has a maximum tenure of three years**, making electoral cycles naturally different.
- 3. Institutional Stability in Germany:** Stability arises not from simultaneous elections but from the **Constructive Vote of No Confidence**, which requires Parliament to elect a successor before removing a Chancellor.

4. **Electoral System Differences:** Countries like South Africa and Indonesia use proportional representation that distributes political power and protects minority voices, while **India's first-past-the-post system allows a national wave to strongly influence State elections.**

5. **Presidential System Comparison:** In the United States, fixed electoral cycles function because the executive does not depend on legislative confidence, which differs fundamentally from a parliamentary system.

6. **Indonesia's Experience as a Cautionary Lesson:** Simultaneous elections in 2019 caused nearly 900 poll worker deaths and over 5,000 illnesses, while 2024 elections led to more than 100 deaths and nearly 15,000 illnesses, leading Indonesia's Constitutional Court in 2025 to order separation of national and local elections from 2029.

## Major Concerns with the One Nation, One Election Proposal

### 1. Parliamentary Accountability vs Stability

a. **Parliamentary Responsibility Principle:** India adopted a parliamentary system where governments remain in power only while they enjoy legislative confidence. **B. R. Ambedkar** emphasised that democracy cannot maximise both stability and responsibility simultaneously.

b. **Maximum Tenure, Not Guaranteed Tenure:** Articles 83 and 172 prescribe only the maximum five-year tenure of legislatures, allowing early dissolution so voters can renew the mandate when confidence collapses.

c. **Shift Toward Guaranteed Executive Stability:** Synchronised elections treat dissolution as an administrative inconvenience and **push the system toward a quasi-presidential logic**, weakening continuous legislative accountability.

### 2. Federalism Concerns

a. **Federalism as a Basic Structure Principle:** In **S. R. Bommai v. Union of India**, the Supreme Court affirmed that **federalism forms part of the Constitution's basic structure**, recognising the independent constitutional identity of States.

b. **Truncation of State Mandates:** Synchronisation may shorten State Assembly tenures even when governments retain legislative confidence; for example, **a State elected in 2033 could see its mandate end in only one year if the national cycle requires alignment.**

c. **Loss of Continuous Democratic Feedback:** Staggered elections at the national, State and local levels create **regular electoral feedback that keeps governments attentive to public opinion**, acting as a substitute for recall mechanisms.

### 3. Problems of Unexpired-Term Elections

a. **Devaluation of the Electoral Mandate:** Mid-cycle elections would produce governments with **shortened mandates**, making elections appear provisional and potentially increasing voter apathy.

**b. Weak Governance Incentives:** Governments with residual tenure may avoid structural reforms and rely on **short-term populist policies**.

**c. Governance Dead Zone Risk:** The amendment does not define the **minimum duration required to trigger an unexpired-term election**, creating uncertainty in governance.

#### 4. Risks of Election Deferral and President's Rule

**a. Unguided Discretion in Election Deferral:** Proposed Article 82A allows the Election Commission to recommend **deferring State elections without clear criteria, time limits or parliamentary oversight**, creating institutional ambiguity.

**b. Possibility of Prolonged Unelected Governance:** If a State government falls mid-term, **President's Rule may continue while elections are deferred**, allowing the Union government to administer the State through the Governor.

**c. Weak Institutional Safeguards:** Even Article 356 includes parliamentary approval and time limits, while **Article 82A creates broader discretionary authority**, raising concerns about constitutional misuse.

#### 5. Weakness of the Cost Argument

**a. Election Expenditure Is Economically Small:** Parliamentary Standing Committee estimates show combined Lok Sabha and Assembly election spending around **₹4,500 crore in 2015-16**, about **0.25% of the Union Budget and 0.03% of GDP**.

**b. Historical Cost Evidence:** Data indicates Lok Sabha election expenditure ranged between **0.02% and 0.05% of GDP between 1957 and 2014**, showing elections impose a limited fiscal burden.

**c. Operational Efficiency of Staggered Elections:** Elections are conducted in phases, lasting about **82 days in 2024**, allowing rotation of **EVMs, VVPATs and security forces**.

**d. Higher Logistical Demand for Simultaneous Polls:** Conducting elections together would require **larger numbers of machines, personnel and security forces at the same time**, potentially increasing costs and administrative pressure.

#### Way Forward

1. **Respecting Federal Democratic Rhythms:** Electoral cycles should respect the **independent mandates of States**, ensuring that democratic accountability remains continuous and responsive.

2. **Respecting Federal Democratic Rhythms:** Reforms must maintain the principle that governments remain in office **only while they enjoy legislative confidence**, which is central to the parliamentary system.

3. **Avoiding Constitutional Distortion:** Electoral reforms should not undermine **federalism or parliamentary responsibility**, which form part of the Constitution's basic structure.

4. **Reconsidering the Amendment Proposal:** The **Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on Union-State Relations** recommended that the proposed amendment should be **withdrawn**.

## Conclusion

The **One Nation, One Election** proposal promises administrative efficiency but raises serious constitutional and democratic concerns. It may weaken parliamentary accountability, disturb federal balance and create governance complications through truncated mandates and election deferrals. Election expenditure is relatively small compared to these risks. Preserving staggered electoral cycles therefore remains important for maintaining democratic accountability and constitutional stability.

## Question for practice:

**Evaluate** the constitutional, federal and governance concerns associated with the proposal of **One Nation, One Election** in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Why algorithmic sovereignty should be India's top priority

Source: The post "**Why algorithmic sovereignty should be India's top priority**" has been created, based on "**Why algorithmic sovereignty should be India's top priority**" published in "**The Hindu**" on **10th March 2026**.

## UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Science & Technology

**Context:** Algorithmic sovereignty refers to a nation's ability to **develop, control, and govern its own AI models, datasets, and digital infrastructure**. As AI systems increasingly influence geopolitical analysis, legal interpretation, and policymaking, the perspectives embedded within them become important. The dominance of Western and Chinese AI architectures raises concerns for India about **strategic dependence and bias in algorithmic outputs**.

## Why Algorithmic Sovereignty Should Be India's Priority

### 1. Structural Bias in AI Systems

- a. Contemporary AI models are trained predominantly on **Western datasets, legal scholarship, and institutional knowledge**.
- b. As a result, these systems tend to reproduce Western interpretations of international law and geopolitics.
- c. For example, AI responses regarding maritime law or military activities may reflect **Western naval doctrine rather than the perspectives of India and other Global South nations**.
- d. This structural bias can make Western viewpoints appear as the default position while alternative interpretations remain underrepresented.

### 2. Geopolitical and Strategic Risks

- a. AI systems are increasingly used by policymakers, analysts, and researchers to interpret international events.

- b. If such systems consistently favour the interpretive frameworks of powerful Western states, their outputs may **shape geopolitical discourse and policy thinking** in ways that do not align with India's strategic interests.
- c. In effect, algorithmic interpretations may amplify certain narratives and influence how international law, conflict, and diplomacy are understood.

### 3. Digital Colonialism

- a. Dependence on foreign AI infrastructure—such as **chips, cloud computing, and foundational models**—creates structural asymmetry.
- b. If core technological systems remain controlled by external actors, India's sovereignty in the digital domain could become **conditional on access granted by foreign providers**.
- c. In such a scenario, foreign algorithms may determine how data is processed, how innovation occurs, and how knowledge is produced, leading to a form of **digital colonialism**.

### 4. Cultural and Linguistic Limitations

- a. Global AI models are largely trained on datasets that do not adequately represent **India's linguistic diversity and socio-cultural realities**.
- b. Consequently, these systems may struggle to effectively capture the complexities of India's governance, economy, and society.
- c. Without indigenous datasets and models, Indian languages and local contexts risk being treated as secondary inputs rather than primary foundations of AI development.

### 5. National Security Concerns

- a. AI-driven systems increasingly influence areas such as **strategic analysis, conflict interpretation, and information flows**.
- b. If India relies heavily on foreign AI infrastructure, there is a risk that the country's strategic thinking and decision-making processes may depend on external technological ecosystems.
- c. Such dependence can create vulnerabilities in sensitive domains related to **security and geopolitical decision-making**.

## Debate: Foreign AI Stack vs Indigenous Development

### 1. Argument for Using Foreign AI Systems

- a. Some experts argue that India should prioritise **rapid adoption and deployment of existing global AI technologies**.
- b. Given the technological lead of countries like the United States, it may be more practical to integrate advanced foreign models into India's sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and governance.
- c. This approach focuses on **closing the deployment gap** rather than attempting to compete immediately in the development of frontier AI models.

### 2. Argument for Sovereign AI Stack

- a. Others emphasise that exclusive reliance on foreign foundational models poses long-term strategic risks.
- b. Since many global AI systems are trained on Western data and assumptions, they may carry **linguistic, cultural, and strategic biases** that do not align with India's realities.
- c. Therefore, developing indigenous AI capabilities is necessary to avoid technological dependence and ensure that India's digital ecosystem reflects **its own societal and geopolitical perspectives**.

### Way Forward

**1. Invest in Domestic Compute Infrastructure:** India must build **domestic computing capacity and technological infrastructure** required for training advanced AI models. This includes investments in computing resources and technological ecosystems necessary to sustain independent AI development.

**2. Develop Indigenous Datasets:** Creating datasets that reflect **India's linguistic diversity, social realities, and governance structures** is essential. Indigenous training data will allow AI systems to better understand and represent Indian contexts rather than relying on externally generated knowledge bases.

**3. Promote Indian AI Models and Frameworks:** India should focus on becoming a **producer of AI models and interpretive frameworks**, not merely a consumer of foreign technologies. Encouraging research and development within domestic institutions can strengthen India's position in the global AI landscape.

**4. Strengthen Secure Data Infrastructure:** Building secure and reliable data infrastructure is necessary to ensure **control over data flows and digital ecosystems**. This will help prevent external entities from dominating the technological architecture that supports AI systems.

**5. Adopt a Strategic Integration Approach:** India should pursue a strategy of **strategic choice rather than technological isolation**. While engaging with global AI ecosystems, it must maintain the ability to integrate external technologies without becoming structurally dependent on them.

**Conclusion:** AI is emerging as a critical arena of global competition where technological capability translates into geopolitical influence. For India, algorithmic sovereignty is essential to ensure that **its perspectives, priorities, and realities are reflected in AI-driven knowledge systems**. By investing in domestic capabilities while maintaining strategic global engagement, India can build a resilient and independent AI ecosystem.

**Question:** Why should algorithmic sovereignty be a top priority for India in the age of Artificial Intelligence? Discuss the challenges of relying on foreign AI systems and suggest the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Export policy must move away from subsidies

**Source:** The post "Export policy must move away from subsidies" has been created, based on "Export policy must move away from subsidies" published in "Business Line" on 10th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** For decades, India's export policy relied heavily on **financial incentives such as the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) and the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP)** to improve price competitiveness. However, rising geopolitical tensions, climate regulations, and protectionist policies are making subsidy-driven strategies less effective. In this context, India must redesign its export policy to focus on **structural competitiveness, resilience, and regulatory compliance**.

### **Budget 2026-27 Measures to Strengthen Export Resilience**

**1. Export Credit and Financial Support:** The government has allocated **₹7,295 crore for export credit support**, including interest subvention and collateral support. These measures aim to improve access to finance, particularly for MSME exporters, by reducing borrowing costs and easing credit constraints.

**2. Customs and Trade Facilitation Reforms:** Customs reforms include extending **duty deferment from 15 to 30 days for authorised economic operator (AEO) manufacturers** and expanding trusted trader clearances. These steps aim to reduce procedural delays and improve predictability in export operations.

**3. Boost to E-Commerce Exports:** The removal of the **₹10 lakh cap on courier exports** is intended to support the growth of cross-border e-commerce, enabling smaller exporters to access international markets more easily.

**4. Reduction in Input Costs:** The increase in **duty-free import limits for seafood processing inputs from 1% to 3% of previous year's FOB turnover** helps reduce input cost exposure for exporters in the seafood sector.

**5. Logistics and Infrastructure Investments:** A **₹12.2 lakh crore public capital expenditure programme** focuses on improving freight corridors, waterways, and coastal cargo infrastructure. These investments aim to reduce logistics costs, which currently account for around **7-8% of India's GDP**.

### **Limitations of Subsidy-Driven Export Policies**

#### **1. Geopolitical Uncertainty**

- a. Recent global conflicts and geopolitical tensions have increased volatility in international trade.
- b. Such disruptions expose the limitations of relying solely on financial incentives to maintain export competitiveness.
- c. When supply chains are affected by sanctions, wars, or political tensions, subsidies cannot offset the structural disruptions faced by exporters.

#### **2. Fragmentation of Global Supply Chains**

- a. The global trading system is increasingly shaped by **sanctions, technology controls, and friend-shoring strategies** adopted by major economies.
- b. These trends fragment global supply chains and alter trade patterns. In such an environment, competitiveness depends more on **supply chain resilience and diversification** rather than fiscal incentives.

#### **3. Rising Compliance and Climate Regulations**

- a. International trade is increasingly influenced by **environmental and regulatory standards**, particularly climate-related regulations.
- b. Exporters must comply with sustainability requirements, carbon reporting, and environmental standards.
- c. Subsidies alone cannot address these regulatory challenges; instead, exporters need **institutional and technical support to meet global compliance standards**.

#### 4. Structural Cost Disadvantages

- a. High **logistics costs, financing constraints, and regulatory delays** continue to affect India's export competitiveness.
- b. These structural issues increase production and transaction costs for exporters. Subsidies may temporarily compensate exporters, but they do not address the underlying inefficiencies in infrastructure and logistics systems.

#### Lessons from Global Export Competitors

1. Several developing economies have strengthened export competitiveness by focusing on structural reforms rather than subsidies.
2. For instance, some countries have significantly reduced customs clearance times and invested in compliance infrastructure to meet global sustainability standards.
3. These measures enhance **long-term competitiveness and market credibility** in international trade.

#### Key Areas for Policy Implementation

##### 1. Strengthening Compliance Capacity

- a. India must develop **carbon accounting and life-cycle assessment facilities in major export clusters**, especially in sectors such as steel, textiles, chemicals, and engineering goods.
- b. Improving certification systems and reducing approval timelines will help exporters meet international environmental standards.

##### 2. Expanding Export Credit and Insurance

- a. Export credit and insurance coverage should be expanded significantly to protect exporters from global market risks.
- b. Faster claim settlement and reduced lending costs for MSMEs will enhance financial stability for exporters.

##### 3. Strengthening Trade Diplomacy

- a. India needs to adopt a more proactive approach to international trade negotiations.
- b. Investing in **technical trade diplomacy, regulatory monitoring systems, and sector-specific policy expertise** will help India influence global regulatory frameworks and protect its export interests.

**Conclusion:** The evolving global trade environment requires India to move beyond subsidy-based export policies toward a **resilience-oriented strategy**. Sustainable export growth will depend on improved logistics, stronger compliance systems, expanded financial support, and proactive trade diplomacy. By focusing on

structural reforms and capability building, India can transform its export policy into a framework that ensures **long-term global competitiveness and stability**.

**Question:** Why should India move away from subsidy-based export policies? Discuss the need for a resilience-oriented export strategy in the current geopolitical environment.

**Source:** [Business Line](#)

## The Iran War Intensifies India's Strategic Challenge

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-international relation

### Introduction

The Iran war intensifies India's strategic challenge as the conflict between the United States, Israel and Iran reshapes the geopolitical environment of West Asia. The confrontation is not mainly about nuclear weapons or missile threats. The central objective is to weaken the ideological foundation of the Iranian regime and its regional influence. This escalation threatens regional stability, global energy routes and political balance in West Asia, creating serious strategic and economic implications for India.

### What the war is trying to achieve?

- 1. Eliminating the ideological foundation of the Iranian regime:** The conflict is not aimed at removing an immediate military threat, stopping missiles, or preventing nuclear rebuilding. **The central objective is to destroy the ideology driving the Iranian government.**
- 2. Regime change as the proposed solution:** The United States and Israel argue that **removing the current Iranian regime is necessary to eliminate this ideological influence.**
- 3. Ending Iran's proxy war against Israel:** Israel seeks to weaken Iran's support for **non-state actors hostile to Israel**, which it considers an existential security threat.
- 4. Weakening Iran's governance structure through military pressure:** Air strikes have targeted **military institutions, security systems, and oil infrastructure** to break the cohesion of Iran's state structure and provoke internal opposition.
- 5. Forcing regional strategic change:** The broader objective is to **reduce Iran's influence across West Asia and reshape the regional balance of power.**

### Why the conflict started?

- 1. Iran's long-term use of proxy groups:** Iran has supported organisations such as **Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shia militias in Iraq**, which expanded Iran's regional influence.
- 2. Proxy actors destabilising regional states:** Some Iranian-backed groups have become **powerful political actors within their countries**, affecting government formation and internal stability.

3.  **Hamas attacks triggering escalation: Iran's support for Hamas during the October 7, 2023 attacks** exposed Iran's proxy network to intense Israeli retaliation.

4.  **Regional fear of Iranian influence:** Iran's policy of exporting instability created concern among  **Gulf monarchies**, which prefer a stable regional order.

5.  **Diplomatic shift through the Abraham Accords:** Under American encouragement, several Gulf states signed the  **Abraham Accords to normalise relations with Israel** as a way to stabilise the region.

### Wider Geopolitical Implications

1.  **Exposure of Gulf security vulnerabilities:** The conflict has exposed weaknesses in the  **U.S. security umbrella protecting Gulf states**, making the region appear more vulnerable.

2.  **Threat to global energy security:** The war has placed  **oil infrastructure and energy routes under serious risk**, which affects global markets.

3.  **Pressure on the United States to end the war:** Escalation has increased risks to regional security, pushing Washington to consider an early end to the conflict.

4.  **Strategic advantage for global rivals:** A prolonged U.S. engagement in West Asia would reduce American focus on  **China and Russia**.

5.  **China's potential strategic gains:** Continued U.S. distraction could strengthen China's strategic position, including its ambitions regarding  **Taiwan**.

6.  **Economic impact benefiting Russia:**  **Rising oil prices favour Russia** during its confrontation in Ukraine.

7.  **Mixed signals from the United States:** The U.S. leadership has sent  **conflicting messages about ending or prolonging the war**, reflecting uncertainty about its strategy.

8.  **Evidence of economic pressure:** The United States has even  **requested India to buy more Russian oil to stabilise global prices**.

### Impact on India

1.  **Energy security risks:** India depends significantly on oil supplies from West Asia, making disruptions in the region economically damaging.

2.  **Reduced U.S. strategic attention:** If the United States remains heavily engaged in West Asia, it will have  **less strategic bandwidth to focus on India**.

3.  **Regional instability affecting Indian interests:** Escalation in West Asia creates uncertainty in a region where India has deep economic and political stakes.

4.  **Shrinking strategic space:** India faces growing pressure from both  **the United States and China**, reducing its strategic flexibility.

5. **Rise of alternative regional powers:** Countries such as **Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan** may gain greater influence if Iran weakens.

### India's Strategic Response

1. **Participation in diplomatic initiatives:** India participated as an observer in **the first Board of Peace meeting in Washington DC**, indicating willingness to play a more proactive role.

2. **Protection of Indian diaspora:** India immediately responded to the needs of **Indian communities living in Gulf countries**, which remain a major national priority.

3. **Return to cautious diplomacy:** India adopted a restrained approach after the assassination of **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** and the torpedoing of an Iranian naval vessel near Indian waters.

4. **Limitations of current diplomatic approach:** India's strategy is largely based on **strong bilateral relations with Israel, Gulf states and other regional partners**.

### Way Forward

1. **Adopt a broader regional policy:** India needs a comprehensive West Asia policy that goes beyond individual bilateral partnerships.

2. **Manage contradictions among partners:** Regional tensions such as the **schism between Saudi Arabia and the Emiratis** require careful diplomatic balancing.

3. **Recognise limits of bilateral engagement:** Regional strategy must address wider geopolitical dynamics instead of treating each relationship separately.

4. **Strengthen strategic engagement:** A proactive regional approach is necessary to protect India's long-term economic and security interests.

### Conclusion

The Iran war represents an attempt by the United States to reorder the strategic structure of West Asia. The conflict has exposed vulnerabilities in regional security and intensified geopolitical competition. These developments create serious strategic challenges for India. **A balanced regional strategy, deeper diplomatic engagement and careful management of partnerships are essential for protecting India's long-term interests in an increasingly unstable region.**

### Question for practice:

Evaluate how the ongoing Iran war reflects an attempt to reshape the geopolitical order of West Asia and analyse its strategic implications for India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## BRICS at a Crossroads

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International relation

### Introduction

The U.S.–Israel attack on Iran has created a major geopolitical crisis for **BRICS**, a **10-nation bloc chaired by India**. Iran's membership has turned the conflict into a direct test of the grouping's credibility. The crisis questions whether BRICS can protect its members and challenge Western dominance. It also exposes internal divisions and raises doubts about India's leadership and the future of the **multipolar world order**.

### BRICS and the Vision of a Multipolar World

- 1. Formation as a counterbalance to Western dominance:** BRICS emerged to challenge the **post-1945 global power structure dominated by the United States and Western institutions**. The grouping aimed to create a platform where emerging economies could coordinate political and economic influence.
- 2. De-dollarisation as a core strategic objective:** BRICS sought to reduce dependence on the **U.S. dollar-dominated financial system**. This effort aimed to weaken Western financial control over global markets and payments.
- 3. Creation of alternative financial institutions:** The bloc established the **New Development Bank (NDB)** as an alternative development financing institution. It represented an attempt to create financial systems outside Western-controlled institutions.
- 4. Development of alternative payment mechanisms:** Initiatives such as **China's Cross Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS)** and **BRICS Pay** aimed to build independent financial networks. These mechanisms sought to bypass Western-controlled financial gateways.
- 5. Security and geopolitical coordination through related forums:** The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** functioned as an indirectly connected geopolitical forum. It strengthened cooperation among non-Western powers in security and diplomacy.
- 6. Strategic aim of building an independent global order:** Through these initiatives, BRICS attempted to construct an **independent financial and political architecture**. The effort aimed to provide an alternative to U.S. and Western dominance in global governance.

### Expansion of BRICS and Iran's Membership

- 1. Expansion reflecting growing geopolitical influence:** The expansion of BRICS signalled the increasing importance of emerging economies in global politics. It strengthened the bloc's ambition to represent the interests of the Global South.
- 2. Iran's entry into BRICS in 2024:** Iran formally joined the grouping in **2024**, expanding BRICS to a **10-nation bloc**. This membership enhanced the organisation's strategic reach in **West Asia**.
- 3. Iran's geopolitical significance for the bloc:** Iran holds major importance in **regional geopolitics, energy networks, and trade routes**. Its inclusion strengthened the strategic depth of the BRICS coalition.

4. **Earlier U.S.–Israel military action against Iran:** Iran had already faced a **12-day conflict in June 2025**, where its **nuclear facilities and senior military and scientific leadership were targeted**. This earlier attack had already exposed tensions between BRICS ambitions and Western power.

5. **Collective response under Brazil’s BRICS chairmanship:** During Brazil’s leadership, BRICS issued a **strong joint statement condemning Israeli attacks as violations of international law**. This response demonstrated earlier attempts at collective diplomatic action.

### The Iran War and the Strategic Challenge for BRICS

1. **U.S.–Israel attack eliminating Iran’s top leadership:** The attack killed **Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei** and dismantled the country’s top command structure. The operation was conducted **without formal authorisation from the U.S. Congress**.

2. **Conflict as a challenge to the multipolar world order:** The war cannot be treated as a simple regional dispute. It represents a **direct confrontation with emerging multipolar institutions such as BRICS**.

### 3. Rubio doctrine

a. **Advocating Western dominance:** At the **Munich Security Conference**, U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** called for dismantling the multipolar order. His speech promoted a **Western alliance to reclaim economic dominance over the Global South**.

b. **Economic competition targeting the Global South:** The doctrine emphasised competition for **market share in India, Africa, and Southeast Asia**. The objective was to re-establish Western economic influence in post-colonial economies.

c. **Criticism of international institutions:** Rubio described the **United Nations and other global institutions as ineffective**. This statement reflected a belief that the current international system no longer serves Western strategic interests.

d. **Historical comparison with colonial economic expansion:** Analysts compared the situation to the **East India Company’s expansion**, where economic power and military force captured markets and governance. The comparison reflects fears of renewed economic dominance.

4. **Exposure of internal contradictions within BRICS:** The crisis highlighted differences among member states with **incompatible strategic orientations**. These divisions weakened the ability of the bloc to act as a unified geopolitical force.

5. **Strategic message against resistance to U.S. primacy:** The conflict sends a warning about the **cost of challenging Western dominance**. It raises doubts about the security and resilience of emerging multipolar institutions.

### India’s Role as BRICS Chair

1. **Absence of collective BRICS response:** Under India’s chairmanship, **no joint statement, emergency meeting, or coordinated diplomatic response** was issued. This silence reduced BRICS’ credibility as a geopolitical bloc.

2. **India's silence on the assassination of Iran's leader:** India did not publicly express condolence after the killing of **Ayatollah Khamenei**. This absence of diplomatic response drew criticism.

3. **Individual responses from other BRICS members: Brazil, Russia, and China** independently condemned the U.S. attack. However, the bloc failed to present a unified diplomatic position.

4. **Shift in India's geopolitical alignment:** India has increasingly moved closer to the **Quad and the United States**. This shift reflects a departure from its traditional **Nehruvian non-alignment policy**.

5. **Strategic autonomy interpreted as U.S. alignment:** India describes its foreign policy as **strategic autonomy**, yet critics argue it has translated into closer alignment with the United States.

6. **Violation of India's security role in the Indian Ocean:** The U.S. torpedoed the unarmed Iranian warship **IRIS Dena** in waters under India's strategic influence. The attack occurred **without intelligence sharing or prior consultation with India**.

7. **Weakening of India's claim to Global South leadership:** India's silence during the crisis has eroded its claim of representing the **Global South and acting as a moral diplomatic leader**.

## Conclusion

BRICS faces a decisive moment after the Iran crisis exposed its internal divisions and weak collective response. The grouping now stands at a crossroads. It can either strengthen political solidarity, build coordinated diplomacy, and create collective economic and energy frameworks, or risk fragmentation. The future relevance of BRICS will depend on whether its members act together to defend sovereignty and the interests of the Global South.

## Question for practice:

Discuss how the Iran crisis has exposed the internal contradictions within BRICS and raised questions about its ability to challenge Western dominance in the emerging multipolar world order.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Reevaluating the office of the Speaker

Source: The post "Reevaluating the office of the Speaker" has been created, based on "Reevaluating the office of the Speaker" published in "The Hindu" on 11th March 2026.

## UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Polity

**Context:** The recent no-confidence motion moved by the Opposition against Om Birla, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, has reignited debate about the accountability and neutrality of the Speaker's office. The discussion highlights the evolving role of the Speaker in maintaining the credibility of India's parliamentary institutions.

## Constitutional role and importance of the Speaker

1. The Speaker is the presiding officer of the Lok Sabha and is responsible for ensuring orderly debate and smooth functioning of the House.

2. The Speaker enforces the rules of procedure and safeguards the rights and privileges of members of Parliament.
3. The office maintains the balance between the authority of the government and the voice of the Opposition in legislative proceedings.
4. The Constitution expects the Speaker to function as an impartial authority who rises above party politics after the election.
5. The Speaker also exercises important powers such as recognising members to speak, interpreting procedural rules, disciplining members, and certifying Money Bills.
6. These powers significantly influence legislative outcomes and parliamentary debates, making the neutrality of the office crucial.

### Process for the removal of the Speaker

1. The Constitution provides a stringent procedure to remove the Speaker in order to protect the dignity and stability of the office.
2. According to **Article 94(c)**, the Speaker can be removed only through a resolution passed by a majority of the total membership of the Lok Sabha.
3. The process begins when a member submits a written notice to the Secretary-General of the House seeking the Speaker's removal.
4. A **notice period of at least fourteen days** must be given before the motion can be taken up for discussion.
5. The **motion must be supported by at least fifty members of the House to be admitted.**
6. During the debate on the motion, the Speaker may participate as a member of the House and vote in the first instance, but cannot exercise a casting vote in case of a tie.
7. Historically, such motions have been extremely rare and have never succeeded, including attempts against **G. V. Mavalankar, Hukam Singh, and Balram Jakhar.**

### Institutional and democratic significance

1. Even when unsuccessful, such motions carry institutional significance by reminding presiding officers that their authority derives from the **confidence of the legislature.**
2. The **credibility of the Speaker's office largely depends on the perception of impartiality** among political actors and the public.
3. **Allegations of partisan conduct can weaken public trust** in parliamentary processes and institutions.

### Contemporary challenges affecting the Speaker's office

1. There is an increasing perception of politicisation in parliamentary functioning.
2. Decisions on issues such as disqualification under the anti-defection law and certification of Money Bills are often viewed through a partisan lens.
3. Frequent confrontations between the ruling party and the Opposition have resulted in procedural deadlocks in Parliament.
4. The neutrality of the presiding office is sometimes questioned, which reduces trust among political actors.
5. Parliamentary conventions and unwritten norms that once guided the impartial conduct of the Speaker have gradually weakened due to intensifying political competition.

### Way forward

1. Political parties should collectively reaffirm the tradition that the Speaker acts impartially after assuming office.
2. Greater transparency in procedural rulings can strengthen trust in parliamentary institutions.
3. Clear explanations for major decisions, such as rejecting requests for discussion or certifying legislative bills, should be provided.
4. Structured dialogue between the government and the Opposition can reduce confrontations and improve legislative productivity.
5. Codifying best practices related to the Speaker's discretionary powers can help clarify ambiguities in parliamentary procedure.

**Conclusion:** The Speaker's office remains a cornerstone of parliamentary democracy in India. Strengthening institutional conventions, transparency, and impartiality is essential to preserve Parliament's credibility and ensure effective democratic governance.

**Question:** The neutrality of the Speaker is essential for the credibility of parliamentary democracy. In this context, examine the constitutional position, removal process, and challenges associated with the office of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### Is India's poverty rate 5% or 24%?

**Source:** The post "Is India's poverty rate 5% or 24%?" has been created, based on "Is India's poverty rate 5% or 24%?" published in "BusinessLine" on 11th March 2026.

### UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** Recent debates suggest that India's poverty rate could be around **5% or 24%**, depending on the poverty line used. According to the **World Bank**, extreme poverty in India declined significantly, but a large share of the population remains economically vulnerable.

#### Extreme Poverty Estimates

1. The World Bank measures **extreme poverty** at **\$3.00 per person per day (2021 PPP)**.
2. Using this threshold, India's extreme poverty declined from **about 27% in 2011-12 to 5.3% in 2022-23**.
3. Nearly **270 million people moved above this threshold**, reflecting major progress in reducing extreme deprivation.
4. However, this benchmark mainly captures **bare survival levels of income** rather than economic security.

#### Poverty in Lower-Middle-Income Context

1. For **lower-middle-income countries**, the World Bank recommends a higher poverty line of **\$4.20 per day**.
2. At this level, **23.9% of India's population (around 342 million people)** were poor in 2022-23.

3. This group includes households that have escaped extreme poverty but remain **economically vulnerable to shocks** such as inflation, job loss, health emergencies, or climate risks.

### Government's Approach to Poverty Measurement

1. Government responses in Parliament have largely relied on the **National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)**.
2. The MPI measures deprivation across sectors such as **health, education, housing, sanitation, and basic services**.
3. The methodology is supported by the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative**.
4. However, MPI was designed to **complement monetary poverty measures**, not replace them.

### Limitations and Methodological Issues

1. Relying solely on MPI avoids the key question of **what income level defines poverty in India today**.
2. Recent poverty estimates also reflect methodological changes in the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey**, including the **Modified Mixed Reference Period**, which shortens recall periods and may increase measured consumption levels.
3. The **Global MPI 2024** estimates that **16.4% (233.6 million people)** are multidimensionally poor, while an additional **18.7% (266.3 million people)** are vulnerable to falling into multidimensional poverty.
4. Selective focus on headline reductions may overlook households just above the poverty threshold.

### Way Forward

1. India should update its **monetary poverty line** to reflect current prices and consumption patterns.
2. A **dashboard approach** combining income-based poverty, multidimensional poverty, and vulnerability indicators should be adopted.
3. Greater transparency in poverty estimation methods and survey changes is necessary.
4. Clear poverty benchmarks are essential for **designing welfare programmes, minimum wages, and targeted subsidies**.

**Conclusion:** India has made significant progress in reducing **extreme poverty**, but a large population remains economically vulnerable. A comprehensive and transparent poverty measurement framework is necessary to ensure **effective policymaking and democratic accountability**.

**Question:** Debates over India's poverty rate often arise due to different poverty lines and measurement approaches. Examine the difference between extreme poverty and economic vulnerability in India and discuss the need for a comprehensive poverty measurement framework.

Source: [BusinessLine](#)

## Inside China, Authority, Conflict and Strategic Challenges

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International relations

### Introduction

China's political evolution since **1949**, when the Communist Party of China came to power, reflects the nature of authority, control, and internal political tensions within the system. The progression from **Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping and later Xi Jinping** highlights how strong leadership has shaped China's political structure. At the same time, internal conflicts, institutional tensions, and external strategic challenges suggest that China's political system may not be as unified as it appears.

### Evolution of Leadership and Power Structure

- 1. Rise of Communist authority in 1949:** China became a communist state in **1949** when **Mao Zedong led the Communist Party of China to victory** and established a political system centred on strong party control.
- 2. Dominance of three iconic leaders:** Although many leaders governed China between **1949 and 2026**, **Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping** left the deepest imprint on China's development and political direction.
- 3. Centralised leadership model:** Each of these leaders exercised **unquestioned authority over both the Communist Party and the state**, showing that strong personal leadership has remained central to maintaining power in China.
- 4. Leadership as a tool of national resilience:** Strong leadership helped China maintain political stability and resist external domination, allowing the state to consolidate power internally while protecting national sovereignty.
- 5. Continuity in governance approach:** Despite differences in style and policies, the leadership of Mao, Deng and Xi demonstrates continuity in the Communist Party's approach of concentrating authority at the top.

### Purges and Internal Party Struggles

- 1. Purges revealing internal power struggles:** China is often portrayed as a political monolith, yet periodic purges within the Communist Party reveal internal struggles for authority and are used by leaders from **Mao and Deng to Xi** to remove rivals and strengthen control.
- 2. Recent military purge under Xi Jinping:** In the latest purge, **PLA General Zhang Youxia**, Vice-Chairman of the **Central Military Commission**, and senior officer **Gen. Liu Zhenli** were removed from the highest policy body of the Communist Party.
- 3. Removal of military lawmakers:** The purge also removed **nine military lawmakers from China's Parliament**, including **Ground Force Commander Li Qiaoming** and **Information Support Force Political Commissar Li Wei**.
- 4. Language indicating internal conflict:** General Zhang was described in the **People's Liberation Army Daily** as **"a toxin that had to be incised,"** indicating deep internal tensions within the party leadership.
- 5. Historical precedent of power struggle:** During Mao's era, the **Liu Shaoqi episode** was seen by experts as an attempted challenge to Mao's authority, showing that internal struggles existed even in earlier periods.
- 6. Declining credibility of anti-corruption narrative:** Repeated purges described as **anti-corruption campaigns** are increasingly viewed as attempts to maintain control rather than purely administrative actions.

### Trust Deficit and Institutional Challenges

1. **Declining belief in leadership goals:** Over time, confidence in the political goals set by the leadership appears to have weakened, creating a **growing trust deficit within the system**.
2. **Economic pessimism within the country:** A **less optimistic assessment of the Chinese economy** has contributed to internal dissatisfaction and uncertainty within political circles.
3. **Institutional pressures within the system:** Problems within some political institutions are increasing internal tensions that may affect the higher levels of the Communist Party.
4. **Purges as a response to rising tensions:** The removal of senior officials may reflect attempts by the leadership to **retain control and suppress internal opposition** rather than simply addressing corruption.
5. **Weakening perception of party unity:** The idea of China as a unified political monolith is gradually weakening as internal tensions become more visible.

### Global Setbacks and Strategic Limitations

1. **Damage to global credibility:** Rising international tensions and China's inability to influence events beyond **East and Southeast Asia** have affected its image as a global power.
2. **Failure of global outreach in Venezuela:** In **early 2026**, China was unable to challenge **U.S. President Donald Trump's** assertion that **the Western Hemisphere belonged to the United States**, despite significant Chinese investments in Venezuela.
3. **Strategic setback in West Asia:** China could not prevent the **U.S. attack on Iran**, which resulted in the death of **Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei**, highlighting limits to Chinese influence.
4. **Negative comparisons in military capability:** Events in West Asia led to **unfavourable comparisons between Chinese weapons and those of the United States and Western countries**, damaging China's reputation.
5. **Impact on China's image as a global competitor:** China's inability to counter the United States in multiple regions weakened the perception that **China is equal to the West in strategic power**.
6. **Internal repercussions of external failures:** These global setbacks may have triggered **recriminations within the Communist Party leadership**, possibly contributing to internal tensions.

### China's Recent Strategic Reticence

1. **Shift towards cautious diplomacy:** China, usually known for a **belligerent foreign policy**, has recently adopted a more cautious approach in dealing with the United States and other countries.
2. **Innovation-driven growth continues:** Despite political caution, China is experiencing rapid progress in sectors such as **electric vehicles, pharmaceuticals, logistics, and Artificial Intelligence**.
3. **Reduced confrontation with the United States:** With the exception of the **Taiwan issue**, China has shown reluctance to adopt a confrontational stance towards the United States.

**4. Understated Arctic shipping achievement:** A Chinese cargo ship travelled from **Asia to Europe through the Arctic Ocean in late 2025**, completing the journey in **two weeks instead of three via the Suez Canal**. China, however, presented the route only as improving **global supply chain stability**, rather than projecting it as a **Polar Silk Road initiative**.

**5. Strategic caution linked to economic concerns:** Experts believe this cautious behaviour is intended to avoid provoking Western powers while the Chinese economy faces challenges.

**6. Sensitivity to U.S. warnings in the Arctic:** The United States warned about **Chinese ships near Greenland**, which may have influenced China's restrained position in Arctic politics.

**7. Possible connection with internal political tensions:** Many analysts believe that **problems within the top leadership of the Communist Party** may explain China's recent strategic restraint.

**8. Growing pessimism within society:** A noticeable mood of pessimism is emerging within China, although the reasons behind this sentiment remain unclear.

### Conclusion

China's political structure still appears strong, but **internal tensions, declining trust, economic concerns, and global setbacks** suggest deeper challenges within the Communist Party. Understanding these developments is important because China's actions influence Asia and the wider world. A more cooperative and less confrontational China would help global stability and improve relations with countries such as **India**.

### Question for practice:

Examine the internal political tensions and strategic challenges facing China under Xi Jinping, and explain how they may affect China's global position.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## AI and the National Security Calculus

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3-** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

### Introductions

Recent tensions around Artificial Intelligence show how AI is becoming part of global security competition. An American AI lab, Anthropic, has accused three Chinese AI labs—DeepSeek, MoonshotAI, and MiniMax—of distilling frontier models. At the same time, AI models developed by American companies have reportedly been used by the U.S. military to speed up the “kill chain” from target identification to strike. These developments raise major questions about AI diffusion, military use, and global governance.

### AI Competition and the Distillation Controversy

1. **Industrial-scale model distillation:** Distillation means training a weaker AI model by learning from the outputs of a stronger model. Anthropic claims Chinese actors conducted **16 million exchanges with its Claude model through about 24,000 fraudulent accounts**, violating access restrictions.
2. **Use of deceptive techniques:** The distillation activity reportedly used sophisticated methods to hide their identity and intent while extracting model outputs. This indicates organised efforts to reproduce advanced AI capabilities.
3. **National security framing:** Anthropic wants DeepSeek, MoonshotAI, and MiniMax to be treated as **national security threats**. This reflects how AI research competition is now being framed in security terms.

### Limits of AI Containment Strategies

1. **AI as a dual-use general-purpose technology:** Generative AI is often compared with nuclear technologies. However, it functions more like **semiconductors**, as it supports civilian uses while also having military applications.
2. **Private-sector driven innovation:** Cutting-edge AI research happens mainly in private companies for civilian products. Governments do not control the full development process.
3. **AI models cannot be contained like nuclear materials:** Nuclear non-proliferation works because fissile materials are rare and traceable. Mathematical AI models do not have such physical constraints.
4. **Evidence of technological workarounds:** DeepSeek reportedly achieved **comparable performance to frontier models at a fraction of the cost even after export controls**. This shows restrictions cannot easily prevent technological progress.
5. **Limits of restriction-based control:** Treating simple AI queries as equivalent to weapons proliferation reflects the weakness of containment strategies.

### Military Use of AI and Limits of Corporate Guardrails

1. **Use of AI in military operations:** AI models from American labs have reportedly been used by the U.S. military to accelerate the **“kill chain” from target identification to legal approval and strike**.
2. **Military applications of frontier AI models:** Models from companies such as **Anthropic, OpenAI, Google and xAI** can support surveillance, cyberwarfare, and lethal autonomous weapons systems.
3. **Pressure on companies to support defence use:** When Anthropic raised concerns about military uses of its technology, the Pentagon labelled it a **“supply chain risk.”** This designation is normally associated with foreign adversaries.
4. **Competitive pressure among companies:** Rival firms may accept permissive defence contracts to secure government clients. OpenAI reportedly accepted such arrangements, indicating a **race to the bottom** in guardrails.
5. **Weakness of corporate safeguards:** When governments demand military access, companies can be pressured, replaced, or overridden. Corporate guardrails therefore cannot ensure responsible use.

### Market Power and Innovation Concerns

- 1. Restrictions strengthen dominant firms:** Input-based restrictions make it harder for competitors to challenge large U.S. companies even in civilian AI markets.
- 2. Collateral damage to global innovation:** These restrictions can weaken scientific collaboration, technological innovation, and economic development.
- 3. Debate over intellectual property and fairness:** Distillation is often described as industrial-scale intellectual property theft. However, frontier AI models themselves are trained on **billions of web pages created by people who did not consent or receive compensation.**
- 4. Parallel extractive processes:** Asking an AI model millions of questions and learning from its responses can be viewed as similar to training models on large public datasets.
- 5. Coordinated industry response:** AI firms whose models were distilled argue for coordinated action by the **AI industry, cloud providers, and policymakers.** Such coordination may further concentrate market power among a few companies.

### Conclusion

Generative AI is likely to become part of military systems across countries. Corporate guardrails cannot ensure responsible use because governments can pressure companies, replace them, or override restrictions. Effective regulation therefore requires **plurilateral commitments by states.** These should ensure **meaningful human control over lethal decisions, prohibitions on mass civilian surveillance, and auditable technical standards.** Such commitments must apply universally to remain effective.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how the growing use of Artificial Intelligence in military systems and global technological competition is reshaping the national security calculus.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Withdrawing life-supporting care: The procedure and the hurdles

Source: The post "**Withdrawing life-supporting care: The procedure and the hurdles**" has been created, based on "**Withdrawing life-supporting care: The procedure and the hurdles**" published in "Indian Express" on 12th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-3- Science and technology

**Context:** Euthanasia refers to the practice of intentionally ending or allowing the end of a person's life in order to relieve suffering caused by a terminal or incurable illness. In India, **active euthanasia is illegal**, but **passive euthanasia has been permitted by the Supreme Court under strict safeguards**, recognising the right to die with dignity as part of **Article 21 of the Constitution.** Important judicial developments include the judgments

in Aruna Shanbaug Case and Common Cause vs Union of India, which laid down guidelines for passive euthanasia and living wills.

## Types of Euthanasia

### I. Active Euthanasia

- a. Active euthanasia refers to the deliberate act of ending a patient's life through measures such as administering a lethal injection or drug.
- b. This form of euthanasia is illegal in India because it involves directly causing the death of a patient.
- c. However, active euthanasia is legal in some countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and parts of Europe under specific regulations.

### II. Passive Euthanasia

- a. Passive euthanasia refers **to allowing a patient to die naturally by withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining medical treatment.**
- b. It involves stopping treatments that artificially prolong life when there is no reasonable hope of recovery.
- c. Such treatments may include ventilator support, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, dialysis, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or artificial nutrition.

## Procedure for Passive Euthanasia in India

### 1. Assessment by the Treating Physician

- a. The process begins when the treating physician assesses whether the patient has any realistic possibility of recovery or meaningful quality of life.
- b. The physician evaluates the medical condition and determines whether continuing treatment would only prolong suffering.

### 2. Review by the Primary Medical Board

- a. A Primary Medical Board is constituted in the hospital to examine the case.
- b. The board consists of the treating physician and two subject experts with at least five years of experience.
- c. The board reviews the patient's condition and discusses the prognosis with the patient's family members.
- d. After consultation, the board and the family attempt to reach a shared decision regarding the withdrawal or continuation of treatment.

### 3. Review by the Secondary Medical Board

- a. If the decision is made to withdraw life-sustaining treatment, the case is referred to a Secondary Medical Board.
- b. This board consists of a doctor nominated by the district Chief Medical Officer and two subject experts with at least five years of experience.
- c. The secondary board is required to review the case and make a decision within 48 hours.

### 4. Informing the Magistrate

- a. After approval by the secondary medical board, the hospital must inform the jurisdictional magistrate before withdrawing life-supporting treatment.
- b. The magistrate's approval is not mandatory, but the information must be formally communicated.

### Role of Living Will

1. A living will is a legal document through which a person can express their wishes regarding medical treatment in advance.
2. It becomes applicable when the person loses the capacity to make decisions due to illness or incapacity.
3. Through a living will, individuals can specify whether they want life-supporting treatments to be continued or withdrawn.
4. The document also allows a patient to nominate a trusted person who can take medical decisions on their behalf.

### Key Hurdles in Implementation

1. **Lack of Medical Expertise:** Many hospitals, especially in smaller towns, do not have enough experienced specialists to form the required medical boards.
2. **Delay in Formation of Secondary Boards:** The process requires a list of nominated doctors from the district Chief Medical Officer, but many states have not yet prepared such lists.
3. **Administrative and Procedural Complexity:** The requirement of multiple boards and formal procedures often makes the process slow and difficult to implement in practice.
4. **Fear of Legal Consequences:** Many private hospitals hesitate to withdraw life-supporting treatment because they fear litigation and legal complications.
5. **Emotional and Ethical Concerns:** Families often experience emotional distress and guilt while taking decisions related to withdrawing life-sustaining treatment.

### Way Forward

1. The government should enact a **clear law on euthanasia** to replace reliance on judicial guidelines.
2. States should **prepare lists of qualified doctors** for secondary medical boards to ensure timely decisions.
3. Hospitals should strengthen **palliative care and ethics committees** to guide end-of-life decisions.
4. Awareness about **living wills** should be increased to respect patient autonomy.
5. **Legal protection for doctors** acting in good faith should be ensured to reduce fear of litigation.

**Conclusion:** Passive euthanasia in India attempts to balance patient autonomy, medical ethics, and legal safeguards. Although the Supreme Court has provided a framework to ensure the right to die with dignity, effective implementation requires better awareness, institutional preparedness, and simplification of procedures.

**Question:** Explain the concept of euthanasia and discuss the procedure and challenges in implementing passive euthanasia in India.

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

## Kisan Credit Card: Fueling Growth in Agriculture

**Source:** The post “Kisan Credit Card: Fueling Growth in Agriculture” has been created, based on “Kisan Credit Card: Fueling Growth in Agriculture” published in “PIB” on 12th March 2026

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Governance

**Context:** The Kisan Credit Card Scheme was introduced in 1998 to provide timely and affordable institutional credit to farmers for crop cultivation and allied activities. The scheme aims to reduce dependence on informal moneylenders and promote financial inclusion among farmers. With around 46.1% of India’s population dependent on agriculture, strengthening institutional credit remains a key policy priority.

### Key Features of KCC

1. The scheme provides short-term crop loans, working capital, and investment credit for agriculture and allied activities.
2. It offers a RuPay-enabled card allowing flexible withdrawals and digital payments.
3. It provides a single-window credit system covering cultivation, post-harvest expenses, marketing, and farm maintenance.
4. The credit is delivered through commercial banks, regional rural banks, and cooperative banks.

### Eligible Beneficiaries

1. Individual farmers and joint borrowers who are owner-cultivators.
2. Tenant farmers, oral lessees, and sharecroppers.
3. Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), ensuring wider financial inclusion.

### Recent Reforms and Initiatives

#### 1. Expansion of Credit Limits

- a. Under the **Modified Interest Subvention Scheme**, the crop loan limit has been increased from ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh.
- b. The **collateral-free credit limit** has been **raised from ₹1.6 lakh to ₹2 lakh per borrower**.
- c. Short-term loans up to ₹3 lakh are available at 7% interest, reduced to 4% for timely repayment.

**2. Digital Transformation:** The Kisan Rin Portal integrates farmer data, loan disbursement details, and interest subvention claims, improving transparency and monitoring.

#### 3. Simplified Application

- a. A one-page application form linked with PM-KISAN records has simplified the application process.
- b. Common Service Centres (CSCs) assist farmers in applying digitally.

### Scale and Outreach

1. More than 7.72 crore KCCs are currently active in India.
2. The total outstanding credit under the scheme is around ₹10.2 lakh crore.

3. Around 457 banks participate in the scheme, including commercial, regional rural, and cooperative banks.
4. The scheme has been extended to allied sectors such as animal husbandry, fisheries, and dairy.

### Challenges

1. Many tenant farmers and sharecroppers lack land records, making it difficult to access KCC loans.
2. Limited awareness among farmers in remote areas reduces scheme utilization.
3. Delays in loan processing and bureaucratic procedures still exist in some banks.
4. Continued dependence on informal moneylenders persists in certain regions.
5. Low credit coverage in allied sectors like fisheries and animal husbandry in some states.

### Way Forward

1. The government should expand awareness campaigns and financial literacy programmes to increase adoption of KCC.
2. Banks should simplify procedures and improve digital infrastructure to ensure faster credit delivery.
3. Special measures should be taken to include tenant farmers and sharecroppers through flexible eligibility norms.
4. Greater focus should be placed on credit support for allied sectors to diversify farmers' incomes.

**Conclusion:** The Kisan Credit Card scheme has become a crucial instrument for ensuring affordable agricultural credit. Strengthening digital platforms, expanding coverage, and addressing implementation challenges will further enhance its role in promoting agricultural productivity, financial inclusion, and rural development.

**Question:** Discuss the role of the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme in improving access to institutional credit for farmers. Highlight recent reforms, challenges, and the way forward.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

## A Revision of GDP and Its Implications

**UPSC Syllabus:** Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

### Introduction

Annual **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** measures the final value of goods and services produced in an economy during a year. It is the most widely used indicator of a country's economic size. GDP estimates are prepared using data on output and prices following the **UN System of National Accounts (UNSNA)** framework. India has revised its **National Accounts Statistics (NAS)** with **2022–23 as the new base year**, replacing the **2011–12 series**, which had faced criticism regarding the accuracy of growth estimates and sectoral structure.

### Why the New GDP Series Was Highly Anticipated

**1. Long gap since previous revision:** The revised GDP series was released **after 11 years**, while base year revisions usually take place every **5–10 years**, increasing interest in the new estimates.

**2. Questions over reliability of earlier GDP estimates:** Many official and independent analysts raised doubts about the **veracity of GDP estimates in the 2011–12 series released in 2015**.

**3. Unusual manufacturing growth patterns:** The **manufacturing sector showed higher annual growth rates and a different direction of change**, compared with earlier estimates.

**4. Large expansion of private corporate sector estimates:** The **non-financial private corporate sector (PCS)** appeared much larger in the **2011–12 series**, which differed sharply from earlier economic structures.

**5. Claims of overestimated GDP growth:** Several experts argued that **official GDP growth rates during the last decade were significantly overestimated** in the earlier series.

**6. International criticism of statistical quality:** The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** awarded India a **'C' grade for the quality of National Accounts Statistics**, raising concerns about data credibility.

### Why Revision Was Needed

**1. GDP as the main measure of economic size:** **GDP represents the final value of goods and services produced in a year, net of material inputs** and is the most widely used measure of economic size.

**2. Use of international statistical framework:** GDP estimates follow the **UN System of National Accounts (UNSNA)**, and the latest revision aligns with its **2025 edition**.

**3. Periodic revision of national accounts:** The base year of **National Accounts Statistics (NAS)** is revised roughly every **five to ten years** to update GDP and related aggregates.

**4. Updating other macroeconomic aggregates:** The revision also updates **national savings, consumption, and investment estimates**.

**5. Changes in production structure over time:** As the economy expands, the **mix of goods and services produced changes**, and their prices also change.

**6. Capturing the real size of the economy:** These changes influence the **real size of the economy, excluding price rise**, which makes periodic revision necessary.

**7. Complex statistical exercise:** Revising National Accounts Statistics (NAS) requires **large datasets, multiple statistical procedures, and institutional effort**, usually undertaken by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**.

### Key Changes in the New GDP Series

**1. Reduction in the absolute size of GDP:** The revised estimates show that **GDP's absolute size declined by about 3–4%** compared with the earlier series.

**2. Minimal change in growth rates:** Despite the revision, **annual growth rates in the new and old series differ only by about ±1 percentage point**.

**3. Change in sectoral composition:** The share of **agriculture and industry increased**, while the **share of services declined** in the new series.

4. **Marginal rise in manufacturing share:** The **manufacturing sector's share increased slightly from 14.3% to 14.7% of GDP.**

5. **Decline in manufacturing's absolute size:** Even with a higher share, the **absolute size of manufacturing declined by about 1.5–1.6%**, which remains significant because the sector was central to earlier debates.

6. **Reduced share of the private corporate sector:** The **non-financial private corporate sector's share declined from 35.4% to 33.9% in 2022–23**, showing a **1.5 percentage point drop.**

7. **Steeper decline in the following year:** The difference between the old and new GDP series in the **private corporate sector (PCS) share widens to 3.4 percentage points in 2023–24**, compared **with 1.5 percentage points in 2022–23.**

8. **Increase in the household or informal sector share:** The **household sector share increased by 0.7 percentage points in 2022–23 and 2.7 percentage points in 2023–24**, mainly due to agriculture.

9. **Comparison using overlapping years:** The new series compares **growth rates and sectoral shares for 2022–23 and 2023–24 with the 2011–12 series at current prices.**

### Implications for India's Economy

1. **Unexpected fall in GDP size after rebasing:** In principle, rebasing should **not reduce the absolute GDP size at current prices**, because the underlying economy remains the same.

2. **Possible correction of earlier overestimation:** The **3–4% reduction in GDP size may represent a correction** to earlier overestimated growth rates.

3. **Reassessment of economic performance:** Even a modest correction changes the **understanding of sectoral contribution and overall economic performance.**

4. **Impact on long-term economic targets:** With a **smaller estimated GDP size**, achieving the **\$5-trillion economy target announced in 2019** may take longer.

5. **Partial response to earlier criticisms:** The revised estimates appear to **partly address concerns about sectoral shares and corporate sector size.**

### Way Forward

1. **Need for detailed methodological disclosure:** Greater transparency about **datasets, statistical methods, and estimation procedures** is necessary to assess the new series.

2. **Clarifying causes of growth differences:** Differences in growth rates may arise from **methodological changes, new datasets, or revised statistical ratios.**

3. **Strengthening credibility of national accounts:** Clear methodological explanations will improve **confidence in the reliability of India's GDP estimates.**

4. **Further examination of other GDP components:** A fuller understanding also requires analysis of **consumption, expenditure, and price estimates**, which remain outside the current discussion.

## Conclusion

The **2022–23 GDP revision** introduces important adjustments in India's economic measurement. The new series shows a **3–4% reduction in GDP size**, modest changes in sectoral shares, and a **decline in the private corporate sector's contribution**. These changes may correct earlier overestimation of growth. However, **greater methodological transparency and further evaluation** are essential to fully assess the reliability of the revised GDP estimates.

## Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of the revision of India's GDP base year to 2022–23 and discuss its key changes and implications for understanding the country's economic performance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## What is the Essential Commodities Act, why has it been invoked for LPG supply?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

### Introduction

The Union Government has invoked the **Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955** due to supply disruptions caused by the **US–Israel–Iran war in West Asia**. The conflict has affected the **global energy supply chain and LPG shipments from the Persian Gulf to India**. Since LPG is used by crores of households, the government has used emergency powers under the Act to prevent shortages, regulate supply and ensure continuous availability of cooking gas for domestic consumers.

### What is Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955

- 1. Legal authority of the Act:** The **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** empowers the **Union Government to regulate or prohibit the production, supply, distribution, trade and commerce of commodities declared as essential**.
- 2. Scope of essential commodities:** The schedule of the Act includes **food items, fertilizers, drugs and petroleum products**, and the **Central Government can modify the list and add new items when required**.
- 3. Crisis management instrument:** The Act is typically invoked during emergencies to **prevent hoarding, black marketing, artificial shortages and price gouging in essential commodities**.
- 4. Control over supply chain:** The government can **direct production levels, regulate storage, prioritise allocation and control distribution of essential commodities** under the Act.
- 5. Price stabilisation tool:** The Act also allows the government to **fix price caps and regulate trade practices** to ensure citizens continue to access basic necessities during supply disruptions.

### Reasons for Invoking the ECA for LPG Supply

- 1. High import dependence:** India imports **more than 60% of its total LPG requirement**, making domestic supply highly dependent on international markets.
- 2. Concentration of supply region:** Nearly **90% of LPG imports come from the Persian Gulf**, which increases vulnerability to disruptions in this region.
- 3. Disruption of the Strait of Hormuz route:** The **US-Israel-Iran conflict has halted vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz**, a key maritime route used for transporting LPG to India.
- 4. Limited domestic inventory:** India currently holds only **25-30 days of LPG inventory**, creating a serious risk of shortage if imports remain disrupted.
- 5. Preventing consumer hardship:** Invoking the Act allows the government to **act quickly to prevent shortages and protect crores of domestic LPG consumers** from supply disruptions.

#### Government Measures to Secure LPG Supply

- 1. Mandatory diversion for LPG production:** All **public and private refineries must divert propane, butane and other C3/C4 streams exclusively for LPG production**, increasing domestic supply.
- 2. Priority allocation for households:** The **entire additional LPG output must be supplied only to three public sector oil marketing companies — IndianOil, BPCL and HPCL — for domestic consumers**.
- 3. Restriction on petrochemical diversion:** Producers are **not allowed to divert propane or butane streams for petrochemical production**, ensuring that LPG production remains the top priority.
- 4. Anti-hoarding consumer control:** A **25-day inter-booking period for LPG cylinder refills** has been introduced to prevent hoarding and unnecessary stockpiling.
- 5. Introduction of pooled gas pricing:** The government has introduced **pooled pricing to prevent sharp price increases and distribute the cost burden across users**.
- 6. Role of GAIL in gas reallocation:** **GAIL (India) Ltd has been tasked with reallocating gas from lower-priority users to priority sectors such as domestic PNG, CNG, LPG plants and pipeline operations**.
- 7. Role of PPAC in pooled price determination:** The **Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) will periodically calculate and notify a single pooled gas price** based on the average cost of diverted gas.
- 8. Mandatory acceptance of pooled pricing:** Entities receiving gas must **legally accept the pooled price even if it overrides previous contracts**, ensuring equitable cost sharing.

#### Impact of the West Asia Conflict on India's LPG Supply

- 1. Search for alternative suppliers:** India has begun sourcing **spot LPG cargoes from distant suppliers such as the United States, Norway and Algeria**, which may increase supply costs.
- 2. Pressure on commercial LPG markets:** Reports show **commercial LPG supply is under severe pressure in cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Pune**.

3. **Thin domestic stock buffer:** The available 25–30 days of LPG inventory provides only a limited cushion if supply disruptions continue.

4. **Risk of larger supply gaps:** A prolonged conflict in West Asia could create significant LPG shortages if alternate supplies are not increased quickly.

5. **Impact on hospitality sector:** Hotels, restaurants, eateries, bakeries and food courts have already reported supply halts or reduction in menu items due to LPG shortages.

6. **Disruption of service activities:** Gas crematoriums and gas-based laundry and ironing services are also facing shortages due to supply constraints.

### Conclusion

The invocation of the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** highlights the importance of government intervention during supply disruptions of essential fuels like LPG. The Act enables the government to control production, regulate distribution and stabilise prices to protect domestic consumers. However, the situation also underlines the strategic risk of high import dependence and the need for diversified supply sources to strengthen India's energy security.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955 and explain why the Union Government has invoked it to secure LPG supply in India amid the ongoing West Asia conflict.

Source: [Businessline](#)

### Renewable Transition in India: Policy and Institutional Bottlenecks

Source: The post "**Renewable Transition in India: Policy and Institutional Bottlenecks**" has been created, based on "**India's renewable transition caught between stranded power and institutional Inertia**" published in "The Hindu" on 13th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** India has made significant progress in expanding renewable energy capacity and attracting investment in the sector. However, operational challenges in the power transmission system are emerging as critical constraints.

### Transmission Congestion in Rajasthan

1. Rajasthan currently has around **23 GW of commissioned renewable energy capacity**, but the available evacuation margin is only about **18.9 GW**.
2. Due to this mismatch, **more than 4,000 MW of fully commissioned renewable capacity cannot evacuate power during peak solar hours**.
3. If curtailment were distributed proportionately among all generators, the losses would be approximately **15 percent**, which would be operationally inconvenient but financially manageable.

4. However, the entire burden of curtailment falls on projects operating under **Temporary General Network Access (T-GNA)**, while projects with **Permanent GNA continue to operate without interruption**.
5. This binary treatment creates financial distress for renewable developers who completed projects on time and obtained all required approvals.

### Under-utilisation of Transmission Infrastructure

1. High-capacity **765 kV double-circuit transmission corridors** are designed to evacuate around **6,000 MW of power**.
2. Each of these corridors costs approximately **₹4,000–₹5,000 crore to build**.
3. Despite this design capacity, many corridors are currently operating at only **600–1,000 MW**, which means utilisation is often **below 20 percent**.
4. As a result, several renewable plants remain connected to the grid but are **unable to inject electricity due to gaps in transmission readiness**.
5. Since these investments are recovered through consumer tariffs, **customers end up paying for infrastructure that delivers only a fraction of its intended value**.

### Government Initiatives to Improve Clean Energy Utilisation

#### 1. Green Energy Corridor (GEC)

1. The **Green Energy Corridor** programme was launched to strengthen the power transmission network for evacuating renewable energy from generation centres to demand centres.
2. The project focuses on building dedicated transmission lines and substations to integrate large-scale renewable energy into the national grid.
3. It includes **intra-state and inter-state transmission infrastructure**, particularly in renewable-rich states such as **Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu**.
4. The initiative helps reduce renewable energy curtailment and improves grid stability.

#### 2. National Smart Grid Mission (NSGM)

1. The **National Smart Grid Mission** aims to modernise the electricity grid using advanced communication and digital technologies.
2. It promotes smart meters, automation, and real-time monitoring of power flows.
3. Smart grid systems enable better demand management and facilitate efficient integration of renewable energy sources.

#### 3. Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS)

1. The **Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme** focuses on strengthening power distribution companies (DISCOMs).
2. It aims to reduce technical and commercial losses and improve the financial health of the distribution sector.
3. Improved distribution infrastructure helps utilities absorb higher shares of renewable energy without causing grid stress.

#### 4. National Electricity Policy and Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPO)

1. The government mandates **Renewable Purchase Obligations** requiring power distribution companies and large consumers to procure a certain share of electricity from renewable sources.
2. This policy ensures stable demand for renewable energy and encourages better utilisation of installed capacity.
3. Compliance mechanisms and penalties are used to ensure adherence to these targets.

## 5. Energy Storage and Battery Initiatives

1. The government is promoting **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)** to address the intermittency of solar and wind power.
2. Energy storage allows excess renewable energy generated during peak production hours to be stored and used later.
3. This improves grid flexibility and reduces renewable energy curtailment.

## 6. Real-Time Power Market and Green Day-Ahead Market

1. Power exchanges now operate **real-time electricity markets** that allow renewable energy generators to sell surplus electricity efficiently.
2. The **Green Day-Ahead Market (GDAM)** enables trading exclusively in renewable power.
3. These market mechanisms improve renewable energy utilisation by enabling flexible power trading.

## Institutional and Operational Issues

### 1. Limited Institutional Mandate

1. The national grid operator, **Grid Controller of India Limited**, is primarily mandated to maintain grid stability.
2. However, it does not have explicit accountability for **maximising the utilisation of transmission assets within safe operating limits**.
3. Consequently, there are **no formal utilisation benchmarks or automatic review mechanisms** when infrastructure operates significantly below capacity.

### 2. Planning–Operations Disconnect

1. Transmission corridors are planned by **Central Transmission Utility of India Limited** based on projected renewable capacity.
2. Developers receive General Network Access and invest in projects assuming that the planned transmission capacity will allow evacuation.
3. However, when corridors designed for **6,000 MW are operationally restricted to around 1,000 MW**, a credibility gap emerges between planning and actual operations.
4. This mismatch places the **commercial risks primarily on renewable generators**, rather than on the institutions responsible for planning and operations.

### 3. Operational Conservatism

1. Grid operators often cite **voltage oscillations and potential instability** as reasons for restricting power flow.
2. Although these challenges are real, modern technologies such as **STATCOMs, reactive power devices, and special protection schemes** can effectively address them.

3. Many renewable plants already have **static VAR generators and harmonic filters**, yet they are not allowed to inject power due to conservative operational limits.
4. This indicates that the challenge is increasingly **institutional responsiveness rather than technical feasibility**.

### Way Forward

1. The mandate of **Grid Controller of India Limited** should be expanded to include **maximising transmission asset utilisation while maintaining grid stability**.
2. Curtailment in congested regions should be **distributed proportionately across all generators instead of being imposed entirely on T-GNA projects**.
3. Unused or under-utilised General Network Access capacity should be **dynamically reallocated through transparent real-time mechanisms**.
4. Persistent under-utilisation of major transmission assets should trigger **automatic technical reviews and public reporting**.
5. Advanced grid management approaches such as **dynamic security assessment, probabilistic risk evaluation, and adaptive line ratings** should be adopted to improve utilisation while ensuring reliability.

**Conclusion:** India's renewable energy transition depends not only on expanding generation capacity but also on ensuring efficient grid operations. Addressing transmission congestion, improving institutional accountability, and adopting modern grid management techniques are essential to ensure that renewable infrastructure delivers its full economic and environmental benefits.

**Question:** Transmission congestion and operational conservatism are emerging as major constraints in India's renewable energy transition. Discuss with reference to the situation in Rajasthan.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### Internationalising Higher Education in India: A Reality Check

**Source:** The post "Internationalising Higher Education in India: A Reality Check" has been created, based on "A reality check on Indian ambition for internationalising higher education" published in "The Hindu" on 13th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Governance

**Context:** India is increasingly focusing on internationalising its higher education system by encouraging foreign universities, branch campuses, and academic collaborations. This ambition has gained momentum amid changing global higher education dynamics and policy initiatives by institutions such as NITI Aayog.

### Changing Global Higher Education Landscape

1. International higher education has entered a phase of instability due to rising immigration restrictions and geopolitical tensions.
2. Countries such as the **United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia** have tightened student immigration policies.
3. As a result, these countries increasingly prefer to establish **branch campuses and transnational education programmes** in student-origin countries rather than hosting students domestically.

## India's Efforts to Become an Education Hub

1. India aims to attract foreign universities and position itself as a global education destination.
2. Several leading U.K. universities such as **Queen's University Belfast**, **University of Bristol**, **University of Liverpool**, and **University of York** have committed to establishing campuses in India.
3. The **University of Southampton** has already opened a campus in the Delhi region.
4. These developments indicate growing international confidence in India's higher education market.

## Opportunities for India

### 1. Expanding Global Education Market

- a. Increasing restrictions in traditional destination countries create opportunities for India to host international programmes and campuses.
- b. India's large youth population and expanding middle class make it an attractive destination for foreign universities.

### 2. Academic Collaboration and Quality Improvement

- a. International partnerships can improve teaching standards, research collaboration, and curriculum innovation.
- b. Exposure to global academic practices can strengthen India's higher education ecosystem.

### 3. Economic and Knowledge Benefits

- a. Hosting foreign campuses can attract international students and investment.
- b. It can also generate employment and strengthen India's knowledge economy.

## Challenges and Limitations

### 1. Infrastructure Deficits

- a. Most Indian higher education institutions lack basic infrastructure required for international collaboration.
- b. There is a shortage of adequate hostels, laboratories, and support services for international students.

### 2. Strong Global Competition

- a. Countries such as **Malaysia**, **United Arab Emirates**, and **China** have already established strong education hubs.
- b. For example, Malaysia's **EduCity Iskandar** hosts several international university campuses.

### 3. Risk of Academic Enclaves

- a. Foreign branch campuses may function as isolated institutions without meaningful integration with local universities.
- b. This may limit knowledge transfer and reduce broader benefits to the national education system.

### 4. Brain Drain Concerns

- a. A significant proportion of students studying abroad do not return to their home countries.
- b. Although hosting foreign campuses may reduce outward migration, the aspiration to emigrate for better opportunities may still persist.

### Way Forward

1. India should strengthen **infrastructure and student support services** in universities capable of attracting international collaboration.
2. Institutions must professionalise international offices to facilitate global partnerships and student mobility.
3. Policies should ensure that foreign campuses **integrate with local academic ecosystems rather than operating as isolated enclaves**.
4. The internationalisation strategy must focus on **quality improvement, research collaboration, and mutual academic benefits**.

**Conclusion:** India's ambition to become a global education hub presents significant opportunities, but success depends on addressing structural gaps in infrastructure, governance, and academic integration. A balanced approach that strengthens domestic institutions while encouraging international collaboration will be crucial for achieving sustainable internationalisation of higher education.

**Question:** India aims to become a global hub for international higher education. Examine the opportunities and challenges in internationalising India's higher education sector.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

## Women's Political Participation in India

**UPSC Syllabus:** **GS paper-** Issues related to women, **GS paper II-** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

### Introduction

Women's participation in electoral politics in India has expanded significantly over the past six decades. Women now vote in numbers almost equal to men, and in many State elections they even surpass male turnout. However, this growth in electoral participation has not produced similar gains in representation or political power. **India therefore presents a clear democratic paradox: women are active voters but remain underrepresented in legislative institutions and political decision-making.**

### Rise of Women in Political Participation in India

**1. Early Gender Gap in Electoral Participation:** In the decades after Independence, women's turnout remained lower than men. In the **1967 Lok Sabha election, male turnout was 66.7% while female turnout was 55.5%, creating a gap of 11.2 percentage points**, which widened slightly to **11.8 points in 1971**.

**2. Structural Reasons for Low Participation:** Lower female literacy, restricted mobility, domestic responsibilities, and limited political outreach reduced women's engagement with elections during the early decades.

**3. Steady Reduction in Gender Turnout Gap:** From the 1980s onward the turnout gap declined steadily, reflecting gradual social and political change. By 2009 the gap had reduced to 4.4 percentage points, indicating growing electoral inclusion.

**4. Near Parity in Recent Lok Sabha Elections:** A major shift occurred in the last decade. The gender turnout gap fell to 1.5 percentage points in 2014, and in 2019 and 2024 women voted at nearly the same rate as men, showing significant progress in participation.

**5. Rise in Women's Turnout in State Assembly Elections:** In the early 1990s women's turnout was 4–5 percentage points lower than men, but the gap narrowed steadily during the 2000s.

**6. Women Surpassing Men in State Elections:** After 2011 women began voting at slightly higher rates than men, with the turnout gap becoming +1.13 percentage points during 2011–13 and rising to 2.82 points in 2015–16, remaining 1.6 points during 2020–25.

### Limits of Participation

**1. Gender Gap:** Despite high voter turnout, women participate less in visible political activities such as rallies, meetings, processions, and door-to-door canvassing. Women attending election meetings increased from 9% in 2009 to around 16% in recent elections, while participation in processions and canvassing rose from 5–6% to about 11%, yet male participation remains much higher.

**2. Family Permission Constraint:** The Lokniti–CSDS Survey on Women and Politics (2019) shows that many women require family approval to attend rallies, meet candidates, or take part in campaigning.

**3. Impact of Social Norms:** Women's public political engagement is shaped by family and social expectations, which limit their participation in campaign activities.

**4. Low Representation in Parliament:** Women remain underrepresented in legislative institutions. In the first Lok Sabha in 1952 only 22 women were elected, and representation remained modest for several decades.

**5. Gradual Rise in Women MPs:** The number of women MPs increased from 59 in 2009 to 62 in 2014, reached a historic high of 78 in 2019, and slightly declined to 74 in 2024.

**6. Representation Gap:** Even at its peak, women constituted only about 14% of the Lok Sabha, despite forming nearly 50% of the electorate, highlighting the gap between participation and political power.

### Structural and Social Barriers

**1. Limited Nomination of Women Candidates:** The number of women candidates increased from 45 in 1957 to 599 in 1996, and further to 668 in 2014, 726 in 2019, and 800 in 2024, yet male candidates continue to dominate the contest.

**2. Women's Higher Electoral Success Rate:** Success rate data challenges the claim that women are less electable. In 1957, 49% of women candidates won compared to 33% of men, and in 1962 women's success rate was 47% against 25% for men.

**3. Comparable Success in Recent Elections:** In 2019, 11% of women candidates won compared to 6% of men, and in 2024 the success rates were 9% for women and 6% for men, showing that women perform competitively when nominated.

**4. Limited Political Autonomy:** Women's voting decisions are not always independent. In 2014, 51% reported voting without advice, and this declined slightly to 50% in 2024.

**5. Family Influence on Political Choices:** Around 52% of women consider it important to share the same political views as their family, showing the role of household influence in shaping political preferences.

**6. Perceived Unequal Political Opportunities:** According to survey responses, 58% believe women from political families have easier entry into politics, while 57% feel women from higher economic backgrounds have an advantage.

**7. Preference for Male Candidates:** Nearly 44% believe political parties prefer men when allocating tickets, and a similar proportion believe voters also favour male candidates.

**8. Patriarchal and Social Constraints:** Patriarchal structures were cited by 22% of women as the biggest obstacle, followed by household responsibilities (13%), lack of confidence or experience (12%), cultural norms (7%), and financial or structural constraints (6%).

### Way Forward

**1. Women's Reservation:** The Women's Reservation Bill can increase women's presence in legislatures and help bridge the gap between high voter participation and low political representation.

**2. Electoral Reforms:** Measures to check criminalisation of politics and the influence of black money are necessary to create fair conditions for women candidates.

**3. Party Democracy:** Institutionalising intra-party democracy can widen the pool of women candidates and improve their chances of receiving party nominations.

**4. Balanced Nominations:** Political parties can promote representation by nominating about 33% women in elections to Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils.

**5. Grassroots Leadership:** Strengthening women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions and women self-help groups can create capable candidates for higher legislative positions.

**6. Political Capacity:** Encouraging girls' participation in university politics, debates, internships, and gender sensitisation programmes can strengthen political awareness and leadership skills.

**7. Institutional Support:** Strong women's agencies and organisations can promote equality of opportunity and support women's engagement in politics.

**8. Global Commitment:** Reaffirming commitment to the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration on women's political empowerment can support progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### Conclusion

Women's electoral participation in India has expanded significantly, and in several elections their turnout now matches or exceeds that of men. Yet **representation, political autonomy, and leadership opportunities remain limited** due to structural and social barriers. Bridging this gap requires **institutional reforms, greater party support, and sustained social change** so that women's participation leads to genuine political empowerment.

**Question for practice:**

Examine the rise in women's electoral participation in India and explain why this increase has not translated into proportional political representation and power.

**Source:** The Hindu

**Preparing India for a true innovation-led economy**

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3-** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

**Introduction**

India faces a clear paradox in **research, development, and innovation (RDI)**. Government ambition has grown through large funding commitments, regulatory reforms, and better global rankings. However, outcomes remain weak. **R&D spending is low, global technological influence is limited, and private-sector participation is inadequate.** India's challenge is no longer policy intent but execution. Real transformation requires stronger industry investment, better research commercialisation, and deeper systemic change across the innovation ecosystem.

**Government Policy Push for Innovation**

- 1. Large financial commitments for RDI:** The government announced a **₹1,00,000 crore Research, Development, and Innovation Fund** and a **₹20,000 crore corpus for deep-tech startups**. These measures aim to strengthen long-term technological research and innovation capacity.
- 2. Support for early-stage innovation ecosystems:** Funding for **Atal Tinkering Labs increased from ₹500 crore to ₹3,200 crore**, showing a focus on building innovation capacity among young students and future entrepreneurs.
- 3. Regulatory reforms to promote deep-tech research:** The removal of the **three-year existence requirement** allows deep-tech startups easier access to schemes under the **Industrial R&D Promotion Programme**.
- 4. Opening new sectors for innovation activity:** The **SHANTI Act, 2025** allows patents for the **peaceful uses of nuclear energy and radiation**, creating opportunities for private-sector research and technological development.
- 5. Improvement in global innovation indicators:** India's **Global Innovation Index ranking improved to 38 among 139 economies in 2025**, showing progress in innovation capacity.

**6. Rising domestic patent activity:** Patent filings increased from **under 59,000 in 2020–21 to more than 1,10,000 in 2024–25**, and **domestic filings now account for about 62%** of the total.

**7. Government initiatives for gender inclusion in science:** Programmes such as **Women’s Instinct for Developing and Ushering in Scientific Heights and Innovations (WIDUSHI)** and **Women in Science and Engineering – KIRAN (WISE-KIRAN)** aim to increase women’s participation in scientific research and engineering fields.

### **Structural Weaknesses in India’s R&D Ecosystem**

**1. Low national R&D expenditure:** India spends **only 0.65% of GDP on R&D**, which is far below advanced economies and even lower than most **BRICS countries except South Africa**.

**2. Weak private-sector participation in research:** In many innovation-leading economies, **industry drives the majority of R&D spending**. In India, the **state still carries a disproportionate share**, showing weak corporate investment in long-term research.

**3. Large gap in global patent scale:** India’s patent filings are far lower than **China’s 1.8 million applications** and **about 600,000 applications in the United States**, showing limited technological influence.

**4. Limited global patent protection by Indian innovators:** **Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) applications from India reached 4,547 in 2024**, a 22% increase from 2023. However, this remains far below **China (70,000+)**, the U.S. (54,000+), and Japan (48,000+).

**5. Scale matters for global technological leadership:** Even **Switzerland filed more than 5,300 PCT applications**, highlighting the gap between India and major innovation leaders.

**6. Innovation challenge linked to talent gaps:** Weak research workforce, limited knowledge-sector employment, and gender imbalance together show that **India’s innovation constraints involve both funding and human-capital limitations**.

**7. Weak human capital base in innovation ecosystem:**

- According to **Global Innovation Index 2025**, India ranks **95 in employment in knowledge-intensive sectors** and **80 in the number of full-time equivalent researchers**, showing a limited research workforce.
- It also ranks **101 among 119 economies in employment of women with advanced degrees**, indicating weak gender diversity in high-level scientific research.

### **Weak Research–Industry Linkages and Commercialisation Challenges**

**1. Missing industrialisation base in development trajectory:** India did not experience **large-scale labour-intensive industrialisation** similar to East Asian economies, which affected the development of strong manufacturing-led innovation systems.

**2. Technology entrepreneurship remains limited:** Many Indian unicorns depend on **labour-intensive platforms rather than deep technology innovation**, showing weak investment in long-gestation R&D.

3. **Weak research commercialisation and technology transfer:** Innovation achieves impact only when ideas move from laboratories to markets. In India, this stage remains weak as **technology transfer systems, venture creation mechanisms, and risk-capital alignment between universities and industry remain underdeveloped.**

4. **High uncertainty in deep-tech entrepreneurship:** High-technology innovation requires **patient capital, strong intellectual property protection, and tolerance for failure,** conditions that remain limited in India.

#### Way Forward

1. **Greater private-sector leadership in R&D investment:** Industry must invest in **long-term and high-risk technological research** to strengthen India's innovation capacity.

2. **Strengthening the research-industry-finance ecosystem:** Innovation leaders build **strong bridges between academia, industry, and financial capital.** India must develop similar institutional connections.

3. **Encouraging deep-tech and frontier technologies:** The RDI fund can support deep-tech sectors, including emerging technologies with global impact.

4. **Leveraging emerging sectors for innovation growth:** Commercial space startups show promising progress, demonstrating the potential of private-sector technological entrepreneurship.

5. **Preparing for future global technology standards:** Participation in **6G technology standards and standard essential patents (SEPs)** will reflect India's ability to generate globally competitive technologies.

#### Conclusion

India has created **strong policy support, funding mechanisms, and regulatory reforms** for innovation. However, the real challenge lies in execution. **Low R&D spending, weak private-sector investment, talent gaps, and poor research commercialisation continue to limit outcomes.** Sustainable transformation requires **industry-led R&D, stronger research-enterprise linkages, and long-term investment in deep technology,** enabling India to build a truly innovation-driven economy.

#### Question for practice:

Evaluate whether recent government initiatives are sufficient to transform India into a true innovation-led economy despite persistent structural weaknesses in R&D, human capital, and research-industry linkages.

Source: The Hindu

### SWAMIH: A Policy Lifeline for India's Housing Sector

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

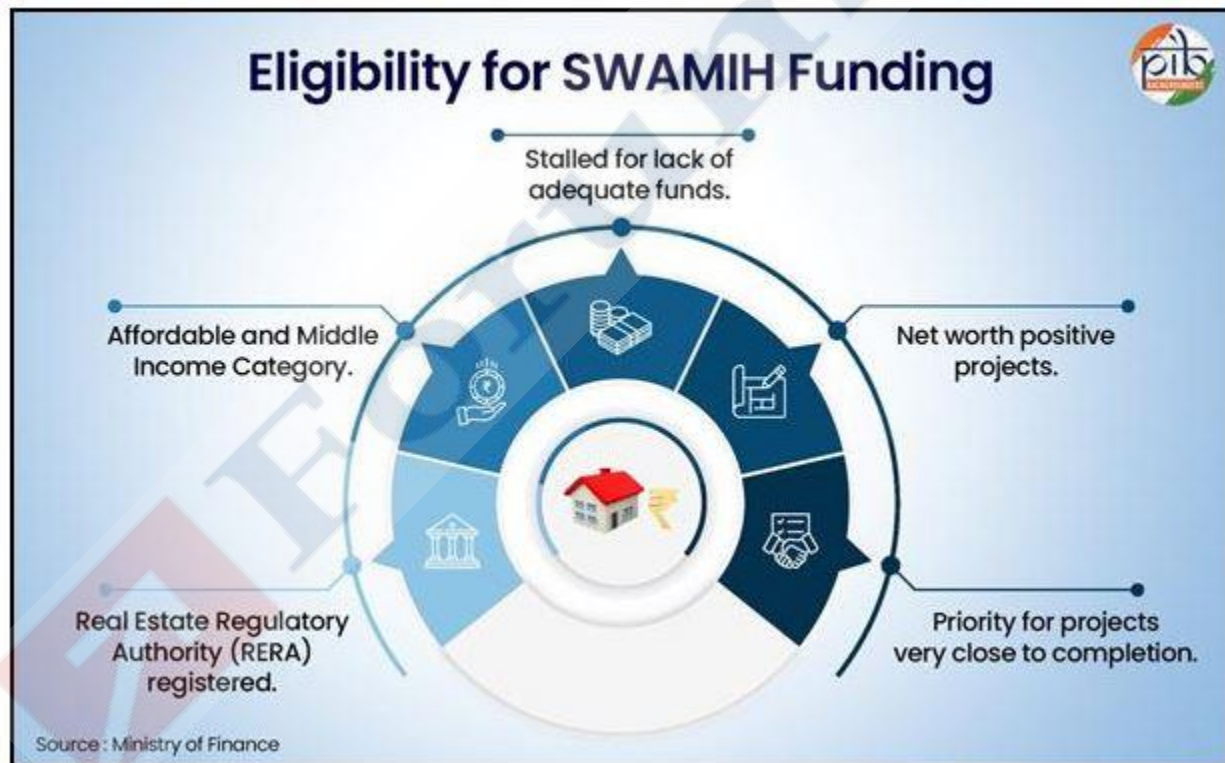
#### Introduction

For millions of Indian families, a home represents a lifetime of savings and aspirations. Yet by 2019, nearly 4.58 lakh housing units across 1,509 stalled projects- requiring Rs. 55,000 crore to complete - left homebuyers trapped between unfinished apartments and mounting EMIs. The SWAMIH Investment Fund was the government's answer: not a subsidy, but a disciplined financial intervention to finish what the market had abandoned.

### What is SWAMIH?

SWAMIH - Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing - is India's first social impact investment vehicle, registered as a **Category-II Alternate Investment Fund (AIF)** under SEBI. What makes it distinctive is its institutional architecture:

- **Governance:** Sponsored by the Department of Economic Affairs and managed by SBICAP Ventures Ltd. (an SBI subsidiary), bringing both policy direction and financial rigour under one roof.
- **Funding:** A corpus of Rs. 15,531 crore pooled from the Government of India, PSU banks, and LIC - deployed as priority debt exclusively for project completion, not fresh construction.
- **Eligibility:** Projects must be RERA-registered, net-worth positive, and stalled due to fund shortage. Importantly, even NPA-classified projects and those before the NCLT are eligible - acknowledging the real complexity on the ground.



### Why was SWAMIH necessary?

The 2018 Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) crisis did not just shake balance sheets - it froze construction sites mid-brick. Developers who had already collected advances from buyers could no longer access credit to finish.

The Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) gave homebuyers a legal voice, but courts cannot pour concrete. The MoHUA Expert Committee (2023) put it plainly — the problem was never about construction capacity, it was about **financial viability gaps**. Without targeted last-mile funding, no amount of regulation could convert steel frames into habitable homes.

### Key achievements

- **58,000 plus homes** delivered across 146 projects in 20 cities and 12 states, benefiting over 2.38 lakh people (December 2025).
- **Rs. 49,500 crore** unlocked, with 44% directed toward Low Income Groups (LIG), and Middle Income Groups (MIG) housing segments.
- **30,000 plus jobs** created across construction and allied industries, consuming 20 lakh tonnes of cement and 5.5 lakh MT of steel.
- **Rs. 6,900 crore+** generated in government revenues through GST, stamp duty, and dues.
- **Financial discipline maintained:** 50% of drawn capital already returned to investors; ₹3,500 crore recovered from the government's own ₹7,000 crore — proving the fund pays its way.

### SWAMIH within India's Housing Ecosystem

SWAMIH was never designed to work alone. India's housing challenge is layered, and so is the policy response:

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U)** creates new housing for stock Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Low Income Groups (LIG), and Middle Income Groups (MIG).
- **PMAY-U 2.0** extends this to one crore more families with a Rs. 10 lakh crore investment.
- **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes** offer rental options for migrants and urban workers.
- **SWAMIH** steps in at the most neglected stage — the finish line — ensuring that years of construction and homebuyer investment are not simply written off.

### Way Forward

SWAMIH Fund-2, announced in Budget 2025-26 with a Rs. 15,000 crore blended finance corpus, will target one lakh more stalled units. But scaling the model requires more than money:

- Extend reach to **Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities**, where distress is less visible but equally real.
- Link SWAMIH project data with **RERA portals** so homebuyers can track progress without chasing officials.
- Build **real-time monitoring systems** for fund deployment and construction timelines.
- Consider applying the blended finance approach to **slum redevelopment and rural housing** — sectors where market failure and human need collide most sharply.

### Conclusion

What SWAMIH quietly demonstrates is that good policy does not always mean more spending - sometimes it means smarter structuring. By channelling institutional capital into projects the market had given up on, it turned broken promises into delivered homes. As India's cities grow faster than their infrastructure can keep pace, the SWAMIH model - disciplined, outcome-focused, and genuinely attentive to ordinary lives - offers a template worth building on.

**Question for Practice-** What were the key factors behind the stalling of affordable housing projects in India? Evaluate the role of SWAMIH in addressing this crisis.

Source- [PIB](#)

## War in West Asia and the Crisis of Indian Seafarer Abandonment

**UPSC Syllabus-** GS Paper 2- Important International Institutions, Agencies and Fora — their Structure, Mandate

### Introduction

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has brought a long-ignored maritime crisis into sharp focus - the abandonment of seafarers. With at least three Indian sailors killed in attacks near the Persian Gulf and dozens more stranded, the war has exposed the deep vulnerabilities of a workforce that quietly keeps global trade moving. India, contributing nearly 15% of the world's seafarer workforce, bears a disproportionately heavy burden of this crisis.

### What is Seafarer Abandonment?

Under the **Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006** - ratified by over 100 countries -abandonment occurs when shipowners cut off all support to their crew, leaving them stranded without wages, food, medical care, or a way home. For seafarers from low-income backgrounds, the situation is particularly desperate - many have already paid agents large sums for jobs and certifications, making it financially impossible to simply walk away.

### Scale of the Problem

- A record **1,125 Indian seafarers** were abandoned in 2025 - nearly 18% of all global abandonment cases (ITF Report).
- Globally, abandoned ships rose sharply from **20 in 2016 to 410 in 2025**.
- Recent cases include 20 Indians stranded on **MV Manali** near Iran's Bandar Abbas Port (March 2026), 17 Indians on tanker **Global Peace** off UAE (2025), and crew members abandoned off Nigeria, Yemen, and Ukraine.

### Root Causes

- **Flag of Convenience (FOC) System:** Ship owners register vessels in countries with lax regulations to avoid taxes, bypass safety standards, and obscure true ownership. Nearly **90% of abandoned ships** in 2024 flew FOC flags, with Panama recording the most abandonments in 2025.
- **Financial pressures on owners:** Soaring operational costs, unpredictable freight rates, mounting debt, and war-related disruptions push owners to abandon vessels rather than honour obligations.
- **Recruitment fraud:** Rogue agents in India - especially targeting Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities - charge exorbitant fees, promise phantom jobs, and place desperate recruits on financially unstable vessels. Families mortgage land and sell jewellery, only to see their kin stranded in conflict zones.
- **Regulatory gaps:** Easy access to Continuous Discharge Certificates (CDCs) through minimal courses creates false expectations, pushing vulnerable individuals toward exploitative agents.

### Existing protections and recent steps

- Stranded seafarers can contact International Transport Workers' Federation ( **ITF**) **inspectors** globally or the **Directorate General of Shipping's** round-the-clock helpline for embassy support and emergency funds.
- In the last six months, India has **withdrawn 51 Recruitment and Placement Service Licensee (RPSL) licences**, temporarily blocked 50 companies, and blacklisted **86 vessels** for repeated abuses.

### Way Forward

- Strengthen the **MLC enforcement mechanism** internationally, particularly against FOC-registered ships.
- Reform **CDC issuance norms** to prevent exploitation of under-trained recruits.
- Create a **dedicated seafarer distress fund** for emergency repatriation independent of insurance delays.
- Enhance **bilateral diplomatic engagement** with Gulf nations to fast-track rescue operations during conflicts.
- Mandate **verified digital contracts** and eliminate fee-charging recruitment agents entirely.

### Conclusion

Indian seafarers are the backbone of global shipping - yet many come from backgrounds where a maritime career is the only ladder out of poverty, making them easy prey for an exploitative system. The West Asia conflict has not created this crisis; it has merely illuminated what was always there. Protecting these workers demands not just better regulation, but a fundamental rethinking of how India prepares, deploys, and stands behind the sailors who carry its global maritime ambitions on their shoulders.

**Question for Practice-** The West Asia conflict has exposed the vulnerability of Indian seafarers to abandonment by shipowners. Examine the structural causes behind this crisis and evaluate the adequacy of existing legal and institutional mechanisms to address it.

Source- [IE](#)

## The fate of the Washington Consensus, once talisman

### UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

#### Introduction

The **Washington Consensus** emerged in **1989** as a dominant framework for economic reform. It promoted **liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation** as solutions for economic crises in developing countries. International financial institutions promoted these reforms as a universal model for growth and stability. Over time, financial crises, social backlash, and new geopolitical realities exposed its limits, leading to debates about alternative development strategies and a more context-sensitive approach to economic policy.

#### Background of Washington Consensus

**1. Origin of the concept:** The term **Washington Consensus** was coined by **John Williamson in 1989** to describe a policy package aimed at stabilising and reforming developing economies.

**2. Ten policy prescriptions:** The framework included **fiscal discipline, reordering public spending, tax reform, interest rate liberalisation, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalisation, openness to foreign direct investment, privatisation of state enterprises, deregulation, and protection of property rights.**

**3. Central policy philosophy:** The reforms were summarised through the principles “**liberalise, privatise, deregulate,**” which became the dominant approach to economic reform.

**4. Universal reform model:** These policies were promoted as **near-universal remedies for crisis-hit economies,** promising macroeconomic stability and market-led growth.

### Evolution of Washington Consensus

**1. Ideological foundations:** The consensus emerged from the economic ideas of **Reaganomics and Thatcherite structural adjustment,** which emphasised fiscal austerity, deregulation, and reduced state control.

**2. Adoption by global financial institutions:** Institutions such as the **International Monetary Fund and the World Bank,** along with regional bodies like the **Asian Development Bank,** adopted these principles during the **1980s debt crisis affecting many developing countries.**

**3. Conditional economic reforms:** Economic assistance often came with **policy conditions and reform commitments,** linking financial support with market-oriented restructuring.

**4. Spread through structural adjustment programmes:** These reforms were widely implemented in developing countries with the expectation that **market reforms would generate growth and prosperity through the “trickle-down” effect.**

### Criticism and Limits of the Washington Consensus

**1. Financial crises exposing weaknesses:** Major economic shocks such as the **Asian Financial Crisis (1997)** and the **Global Financial Crisis (2008)** highlighted structural weaknesses in the liberalised economic framework.

**2. Breakdown of global trade negotiations:** Failures of **WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle (1999) and Cancún (2003)** revealed deep tensions between developed and developing countries in the global trading system.

**3. Rejection of industrial policy:** The consensus discouraged **state-led industrial strategies,** while WTO rules on Trade-Related Investment Measures (**TRIMs**), **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS),** and **subsidies** limited policy space for developing economies.

**4. Deregulation in weak institutional environments:** Market deregulation was promoted even where **market institutions were weak or absent,** particularly in parts of **Africa and least developed countries.**

**5. Rising inequality and social hardship:** The belief that growth would “**trickle down**” ignored increasing inequality, and structural adjustment programmes often produced **economic stress in poorer countries.**

6. **Limited participation of developing countries:** Economic reforms were largely designed in **Western policy circles**, with limited consultation with developing countries.

7. **Mixed development outcomes:** Some economies such as **parts of East Asia and Chile** combined market reforms with state intervention successfully, while **several Latin American and post-Soviet economies** experienced debt crises and social unrest.

### Current Global Shift in Economic Policy

1. **Growing global dissatisfaction:** Economic reforms linked with globalisation generated protests across the **Global South during the 1990s and later decades**, reflecting dissatisfaction with inequality and policy conditions.

2. **Political backlash in advanced economies:** Movements such as **Brexit and Make America Great Again (MAGA)** reflected growing dissatisfaction with globalisation and economic liberalisation.

3. **Rise of economic nationalism:** Governments increasingly use **tariffs, industrial subsidies, and strategic trade policies** to protect domestic interests.

4. **Supply chain restructuring:** Global supply chains are being reorganised to prioritise **national security and strategic dominance**, rather than pure economic efficiency.

5. **Return of geopolitics in economic policy:** Tariffs and subsidies now serve **strategic and political objectives**, with governments willing to accept short-term economic costs to protect national interests.

### Way Forward

1. **Learning from successful industrialisation:** Countries such as **South Korea, Taiwan, and China** achieved economic growth through **state-led industrial strategies combined with market reforms**.

2. **Renewed focus on development fundamentals:** Long-term growth requires sustained investment in **education, public health, infrastructure, and support for infant industries**.

3. **Responding to new global challenges:** Economic strategies must address emerging issues such as **digital trade, climate resilience, and artificial intelligence governance**.

4. **Emergence of alternative policy frameworks:** Two trends are visible: a **post-Washington consensus emphasising social protection and redistribution**, and a **state-led development approach associated with the Beijing model**.

### Conclusion

The **Washington Consensus** no longer represents a universal development model. Financial crises, inequality, and political backlash weakened its credibility. Economic policy is increasingly shaped by national priorities, geopolitical competition, and social needs. Countries now combine markets with state intervention and strategic policies. The focus has shifted from a single global template to **context-sensitive development strategies suited to national conditions**.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the evolution, criticisms, and declining relevance of the Washington Consensus in the context of changing global economic policies.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Digital world should be made safe for children to inhabit

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

### Introduction

The digital world has become a central space where children learn, communicate, and interact. Social media platforms and digital technologies now shape everyday life for young users. **Children represent nearly one-third of global internet users**, yet digital platforms are not designed primarily for their protection. Many systems prioritise engagement and commercial gain rather than safety. Ensuring a secure digital environment therefore requires **responsible platform design, effective regulation, and active participation of governments, companies, parents, and children**.

### What are the Concerns Over Children's Digital Safety?

- 1. Growing presence of children in digital spaces:** Children now form about one-third of all internet users globally, and many access social media and digital tools from increasingly young ages.
- 2. Children's rights not fully protected online:** Digital environments often overlook children's rights related to privacy, safety, participation, education, and protection from exploitation despite clear global guidance.
- 3. Manipulative design features encouraging prolonged engagement:** Platform features such as autoplay, endless scrolling, and algorithm-driven feeds are designed to maximise engagement and often exploit the psychological vulnerabilities of young users.
- 4. Commercial use of children's personal data:** Platforms frequently collect and analyse children's personal information through behavioural profiling and targeted advertising without meaningful consent.
- 5. Limited response from the technology industry:** The technology industry has had over a decade to address digital safety concerns, yet actions remain slow and largely cosmetic because engagement drives advertising revenue.
- 6. Responsibility shifted mainly to families:** Protection from digital harms is often left to children and their families rather than companies and governments that design and regulate digital platforms.

### Impact of Growing Influence of Social Media on Children

- 1. Digital addiction and compulsive online behaviour:** Platform architecture using algorithmic feeds and autoplay can lead to compulsive usage patterns among adolescents whose self-regulation abilities are still developing.

- 2. Mental health concerns linked to excessive exposure:** Researchers continue to debate the exact relationship between social media and mental health decline, yet growing evidence supports precautionary regulation.
- 3. Cyberbullying harming emotional well-being:** Cyberbullying involves posting harmful or humiliating content online, which can cause embarrassment, anxiety, and psychological distress among children.
- 4. Online child abuse and exploitation risks:** Digital platforms may enable offenders to identify vulnerable children, gain their trust, and later exploit them through threats, coercion, or manipulation.
- 5. Exposure to hate speech affecting social confidence:** Hate speech online can create fear, anger, and isolation among children, and repeated exposure may normalise harmful behaviour.
- 6. Fake news creating confusion among young users:** Children often lack the ability to judge reliable information, making them vulnerable to misleading narratives and misinformation.
- 7. Malware and digital scams threatening privacy:** Children may unknowingly install applications that appear harmless but actually allow access to cameras, files, or personal data.
- 8. Excessive screen time affecting physical and academic life:** Digital addiction may lead to poor sleep quality, reduced physical activity, declining academic performance, and social withdrawal.

### Initiatives Taken to Overcome the Concerns Over Children's Digital Safety

#### A. Global initiative:

- 1. Global Digital Compact commitments:** In September 2024, UN Member States adopted the Global Digital Compact, committing to strengthen legal frameworks protecting children's digital rights by 2030.
- 2. UNICEF "Kindly" campaign promoting positive online behaviour:** Global campaigns encourage **kind communication, mental well-being, and responsible digital engagement among young users.**
- 3. Convention on the Rights of the Child guidance:** International standards recognise **children's rights in digital environments** including privacy, safety, participation, education, play, and protection from exploitation.
- 4. Participatory initiative "Our Digital World, Our Say":** This initiative encourages children to share their experiences and opinions so that digital policies better reflect children's rights and realities.
- 5. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Child Online Protection (COP) Guidelines:** This global multi-stakeholder framework promotes safe online environments for children through cooperation among governments, technology firms, and civil society organisations.
- 6. African Union Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy:** The policy provides principles, strategies, and goals for building a safer digital environment for children across Africa.

7. **European Union Digital Services Act safeguards:** The law requires online platforms to ensure high levels of privacy, safety, and security for children in digital environments.

8. **Indonesia's regulation on digital child protection:** Indonesia requires digital products likely to be accessed by children to implement privacy-by-design protections and prioritise children's best interests.

9. **Brazil's ECA Digital framework:** Brazil requires technology companies to assess and mitigate risks to children and restrict manipulative design and exploitative behavioural profiling.

10. **Australia's regulation on children's social media access: Australia has legislated a ban on social media access for children under 16**, which is expected to serve as an important global case study on regulating children's digital safety and platform responsibility.

#### **B. Initiative taken by Indian government:**

1. **State-level initiatives in India:** Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are exploring time-bound regulations to restrict social media access for minors, signalling rising policy attention to child digital safety.

2. **India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act 2023:** The law prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring, and targeted advertising directed at children, and requires verifiable parental consent before processing children's data.

3. **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012:** The law provides legal protection against online child sexual exploitation and abuse, strengthening accountability for digital crimes involving minors.

4. **Information Security Education and Awareness (ISEA) programme:** Initiatives under MeitY's ISEA project promote digital hygiene and cybersecurity awareness to help users develop safer online habits.

5. **AI-based monitoring of harmful digital content:** Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools are increasingly used to identify and remove child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and harmful online content.

6. **Parental control and digital safety technologies:** Safety tools allow parents to limit screen time, block unsafe websites, and disable location services, helping reduce children's exposure to digital risks.

7. **Digital literacy and school-based education programmes:** Schools are integrating digital wellness, media literacy, and anti-cyberbullying education to help children understand online risks and responsible behaviour.

8. **Student ambassador and peer awareness initiatives:** Programmes such as **Digital Safety Student Ambassadors** train students to educate peers about responsible internet use and digital protection.

9. **Cyber crime reporting mechanisms in India: The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the 1930 helpline** allow citizens to report online abuse, fraud, and digital exploitation involving children.

10. **NCPCR's POCSO e-Box reporting system:** This platform enables children or guardians to confidentially report cases of online abuse and exploitation, strengthening institutional response mechanisms.

#### **Way Forward**

- 1. Shift focus from access restrictions to platform design:** Regulation should not only determine who can access social media but also shape how platforms are designed and operated.
- 2. Introduce mandatory teen-safe platform architecture:** Platforms should provide default safeguards that disable addictive features such as autoplay and infinite scrolling.
- 3. Develop verified youth modes with stronger privacy settings:** Dedicated youth accounts should include stronger privacy protections and tighter messaging controls.
- 4. Ensure transparency of algorithms and data systems:** Technology companies must explain how their algorithms function so regulators can examine their influence on children.
- 5. Strengthen accountability of digital companies:** Platforms should face clear liability obligations for protecting children from harmful content and exploitation.
- 6. Avoid over-reliance on strict age-based bans:** Pure prohibitions may push children toward unregulated digital spaces or encourage rule circumvention through technical loopholes.
- 7. Need for national coordination in India:** Because digital platforms operate across borders, fragmented State-level rules are unlikely to succeed without a coordinated national framework led by the Centre.
- 8. Promote digital literacy and parental awareness:** Children and parents should learn about online rights, safe digital behaviour, and the responsible use of technology.

## Conclusion

The digital world offers opportunities for learning, connection, and creativity, but it also exposes children to significant risks. **Protecting children requires coordinated regulation, safer platform architecture, and stronger corporate accountability.** Digital systems must recognise children as rights-holders and prioritise their safety. Only then can technology remain beneficial while protecting young users from exploitation, manipulation, and harm.

## Question for practice:

Examine the major concerns related to children's digital safety and discuss the initiatives taken globally and in India to create a safer digital environment for children.

Source: [Businessline and NITI Aayog](#)

## Indian fertilizers' Hormuz choke

Source: The post "**Indian fertilizers' Hormuz choke**" has been created, based on "**Indian fertilizers' Hormuz choke**" published in "BusinessLine" on 16th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations

**Context:** The **Strait of Hormuz** is a critical global maritime chokepoint that facilitates large volumes of energy and fertilizer feedstock trade. The ongoing **Iran-Israel War** and the disruption of shipping routes in the Gulf

region have created significant risks for India, which depends heavily on imported fertilizers and energy-linked inputs for sustaining agricultural productivity.

## Implications for India

### 1. High Import Dependence

- a. India's fertilizer sector is closely integrated with global markets because domestic production capacity is uneven across nutrients.
- b. India imported fertilizers worth **\$7.2 billion**, accounting for **2.9 per cent of global fertilizer imports**, making it the **seventh largest importer globally**.
- c. This high dependence on international markets exposes India to supply disruptions and price volatility during geopolitical crises.

### 2. Vulnerability in DAP Supply

- a. India is the **largest global importer of Diammonium Phosphate (DAP)**, accounting for **28.7 per cent of global imports**.
- b. Major suppliers such as **Saudi Arabia (24 per cent)** and **Morocco (22 per cent)** depend on maritime routes passing through the **Strait of Hormuz** and the **Red Sea**.
- c. Any disruption in these routes can delay shipments, increase freight costs, and raise the landed price of fertilisers in India.

### 3. Risks in Urea Imports

- a. India imported approximately **\$2.2 billion worth of urea**, which meets around **20–25 per cent of domestic demand**.
- b. Key suppliers include **Oman (15 per cent)**, **Saudi Arabia (9.5 per cent)** and **Russia (18 per cent)**.
- c. Since urea production depends heavily on natural gas for ammonia synthesis, disruptions in gas supply chains in the Gulf region can significantly increase production costs.
- d. Global urea prices have already increased by **around \$80 per tonne**, tightening supply and raising import costs.

### 4. Impact on Domestic Fertiliser Production

- a. India operates **more than 30 urea manufacturing plants**, most of which depend on **natural gas or naphtha feedstock**.
- b. A significant portion of India's **LNG imports originates from Gulf countries**, making domestic fertiliser production indirectly vulnerable to geopolitical tensions.
- c. Any disruption in LNG supply can increase production costs or reduce the operational capacity of fertiliser plants.

### 5. Structural Dependence on Potash

- a. India has **near total import dependence (95–100 per cent)** for **Muriate of Potash (MOP)**.
- b. Major suppliers include **Russia and Canada**, which highlights the strategic importance of stable global supply chains.

- c. Similarly, **NPK complex fertilisers**, which meet **35–45 per cent of domestic demand through imports**, rely heavily on imported raw materials such as **phosphoric acid and potash**.

## 6. Logistics and Shipping Challenges

- a. War-related disruptions have led to higher **war-risk insurance premiums, vessel shortages, and rerouting of ships**.
- b. These logistics disruptions significantly increase freight costs and delay shipments.
- c. Since fertilisers are bulk commodities, even a small increase in freight costs can substantially raise the landed cost of imports.

## 7. Fiscal and Inflationary Impact

- a. India currently maintains fertilizer stocks sufficient for **more than two months of national consumption**, providing short-term relief against supply shortages.
- b. However, the greater risk lies in rising international prices rather than immediate scarcity.
- c. Higher prices can increase the **government's fertilizer subsidy burden**, strain fiscal resources, and raise agricultural input costs.
- d. These factors can ultimately lead to **cost-push inflation in food prices**.

## Way Forward

### 1. Diversification of Import Sources

- a. India should diversify fertilizer imports beyond the Gulf region by increasing procurement from countries such as **Russia, Canada and South America**.
- b. Diversification will reduce excessive dependence on a single geopolitical corridor and enhance supply security.

### 2. Overseas Resource Acquisition

- a. India should strengthen long-term fertilizer security by investing in **phosphate rock and potash reserves abroad**.
- b. Strategic investments and joint ventures with resource-rich countries can help secure stable supplies.

### 3. Strengthening Domestic Production

- a. India should expand **gas-based urea plants**, modernize fertilizer manufacturing infrastructure and improve energy efficiency.
- b. Promotion of **nano-fertilizers and balanced nutrient use** can reduce dependence on imported DAP and potash.

### 4. Promoting Sustainable Agricultural Practices

- a. Encouraging the cultivation of pulses such as **moong and urad** after the rabi harvest can reduce pulse imports while improving soil fertility.
- b. These crops help enrich soil through **natural nitrogen fixation**, thereby lowering the need for chemical fertilizers.

## 5. Building Strategic Fertilizer Reserves

- a. Maintaining larger fertilizer reserves can help stabilise domestic markets during global disruptions.
- b. Strategic inventories ensure timely supply during critical agricultural seasons.

## 6. Strengthening Maritime Logistics

- a. India should diversify shipping routes and improve coordination between fertilizer importers and shipping companies.
- b. Strengthening **Protection and Indemnity (P&I) insurance mechanisms** can ensure uninterrupted fertilizer shipments during geopolitical tensions.

**Conclusion:** The crisis in the **Strait of Hormuz** highlights the structural vulnerabilities of India's fertilizer supply chain due to heavy import dependence and energy-linked production systems. Strengthening diversification, domestic production capacity, overseas resource partnerships and logistics resilience will be essential to safeguard **India's agricultural productivity, fiscal stability and long-term food security.**

**Question:** Geopolitical disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz expose structural vulnerabilities in India's fertilizer supply chain." Examine its implications for India's agriculture and suggest measures to strengthen fertilizer security.

Source: [Business line](#)

## Why Iran differs from Ukraine in terms of economic fallout for India and the world

**Source:** The post "**Renewable Transition in India: Policy and Institutional Bottlenecks**" has been created, based on "**Why Iran differs from Ukraine in terms of economic fallout for India and the world**" published in "Indian Express" on 16th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- International Relations

**Context:** The ongoing conflict in West Asia involving Iran, Israel and the United States has raised concerns about global energy security and economic stability. While the Russia-Ukraine war mainly affected global commodity prices and India's merchandise trade deficit, the West Asia conflict may impact **both merchandise trade and invisibles such as remittances**, making its economic consequences potentially more serious.

## Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on India

1. The war began when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, leading to major disruptions in global supply chains.
2. The conflict caused a sharp increase in prices of **fuel, food and fertilisers**, commonly referred to as the "3Fs".
3. Global crude oil prices crossed **100 dollars per barrel**, which significantly increased India's import bill.
4. Global food prices rose sharply, with the FAO food price index reaching record levels during 2022.
5. Fertiliser prices such as di-ammonium phosphate and potash also surged due to disruptions in global supply.

## Effect on India's Balance of Payments

1. The primary impact of the war was on India's **merchandise trade account**, as the value of imports increased significantly.
2. India's trade deficit rose sharply from about **102 billion dollars in 2020-21 to more than 265 billion dollars in 2022-23**.
3. However, the widening trade deficit was partially offset by a strong **surplus in the invisibles account**.
4. Invisibles include software exports, remittances from Indians abroad, and other services income.
5. Software exports and remittance inflows increased significantly during this period.
6. As a result, India's current account deficit remained manageable despite rising import costs.
7. Strong capital inflows, including foreign investment and external commercial borrowings, further helped maintain macroeconomic stability.

## Why the Iran Conflict Could Have Greater Impact

### 1. Threat to Global Energy Supply

- a. The conflict threatens the strategic maritime route known as the Strait of Hormuz.
- b. This waterway carries nearly **one-fifth of global petroleum trade and a large share of LNG shipments**.
- c. Any disruption in this route can sharply increase oil prices and significantly raise India's energy import bill.

### 2. Risks to Fertiliser Supply and Agriculture

- a. India imports a large share of **LNG, sulphur and ammonia** from West Asian countries.
- b. These inputs are essential for producing fertilisers such as urea and complex fertilisers.
- c. A prolonged conflict could disrupt fertiliser supply chains and increase costs for Indian farmers.
- d. This may eventually affect agricultural productivity and food security.

### 3. Vulnerability of Remittances

- a. India has a large overseas workforce in Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain.
- b. Nearly **8.9 million Indians live and work in these countries**, forming a significant source of remittance income.
- c. These Gulf countries contribute around **38 percent of India's total remittances**.
- d. If the conflict slows down Gulf economies, employment opportunities for Indian workers may decline.
- e. This could reduce remittance inflows and weaken India's invisible surplus.

### 4. Weak Capital Inflows

- a. India has already experienced a slowdown in capital inflows in recent years.
- b. Net capital inflows have fallen significantly compared to earlier years.
- c. Foreign portfolio investors have also been selling Indian equities, creating pressure on the rupee.
- d. If capital inflows remain weak while the current account deficit increases, India's external sector stability could be affected.

## Way Forward

1. India should **diversify its sources of crude oil and natural gas imports** to reduce dependence on West Asian energy supplies.

2. The government should accelerate the development of **renewable energy and strategic petroleum reserves** to enhance energy security.
3. India should strengthen **domestic fertiliser production and alternative nutrient sources** to reduce reliance on imported inputs.
4. Diplomatic engagement with Gulf countries should be strengthened to **protect the interests of the Indian diaspora and ensure stable remittance flows**.
5. The government should promote **services exports such as IT, fintech and digital services** to maintain a strong invisible surplus.
6. Policy reforms should aim to attract **stable long-term foreign investment**, thereby strengthening capital inflows and reducing vulnerability in the Balance of Payments.

**Conclusion:** The Russia-Ukraine war primarily affected India through higher commodity prices and a widening trade deficit. In contrast, the West Asia conflict could simultaneously affect **energy imports, fertiliser supplies, remittances and capital flows**. Therefore, prolonged instability around Iran could pose **greater economic risks for India**, making proactive economic and diplomatic measures essential.

**Question:** Why could the ongoing West Asia conflict involving Iran have greater economic consequences for India compared to the Russia-Ukraine War? Discuss in the context of India's Balance of Payments (BoP).

Source: [Indian Express](#)

## Building India's Climate Resilience with Water at the Core

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Environment

### Introduction

COP 30, held in **Belém, Brazil in November 2025**, was branded the “**COP of Implementation**.” It marked a shift from abstract climate promises to **measurable and accountable adaptation systems**. **Water moved to the centre of climate resilience**, as global indicators for the first time integrated **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)** into climate accountability. This reshaped the **water-food-climate nexus** and made water security a critical element of climate survival for countries including **India**.

### Water as the Primary Medium of Climate Change Impacts

1. **Climate change expressed through water:** Climate impacts are felt most directly through water systems. **Floods submerge cities, droughts weaken rural economies, glacial melt destabilises Himalayan rivers, saline intrusion contaminates coastal aquifers, and erratic monsoons threaten food security.**
2. **Agriculture and methane emissions:** Agriculture contributes **around 40% of anthropogenic methane emissions**, mainly from **rice cultivation, livestock systems, and organic waste**, linking water management with climate mitigation.
3. **Water management as climate strategy:** **Water-use efficiency, wastewater reuse, aquifer recharge, and resilient sanitation systems** are now essential **climate adaptation and development strategies**.

### New Global Framework for Water Resilience

- 1. Global climate adaptation framework:** The **59 Belém Adaptation Indicators**, under the **UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience**, establish measurable targets for strengthening climate resilience.
- 2. Focus on climate-resilient water and sanitation systems:** The indicators emphasise **reducing climate-induced water scarcity, strengthening resilience to floods and droughts, ensuring universal access to safe drinking water, and upgrading sanitation systems to withstand extreme events.**
- 3. Risk governance and early warning systems:** The framework calls for **universal multi-hazard early warning systems by 2027, stronger hydrometeorological services, and updated national vulnerability assessments by 2030.**
- 4. Shift from asset creation to system reliability:** Water security now depends on **whether systems continue delivering services during climate stress**, not merely on creating infrastructure.

### India's Institutional Foundations for Water-Based Climate Adaptation

#### 1. Integrated water governance reforms:

- Water governance was consolidated under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019**, strengthening integrated water management.
- **Water Vision 2047** promotes **sustainability, equity, and resilience** in water systems.

**2. Groundwater management transformation:** The **National Aquifer Mapping and Management Programme (NAQUIM) 2.0** has shifted from **aquifer mapping to aquifer-level management plans**, linking hydrogeological knowledge with policy action.

**3. River rejuvenation and ecosystem resilience:** The **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)** has expanded beyond sewage treatment to include **biodiversity conservation, digital monitoring, and international collaboration**, making river systems stronger against climate volatility.

### Systemic Challenges in Building Water-Centred Climate Resilience

**1. Persistent and uneven water scarcity:** Water scarcity remains **severe and uneven across regions**, while most climate disasters in India are **water-related**, making **WASH systems the first line of defence.**

**2. Need for climate stress testing of infrastructure:** Reliable water supply during floods or droughts requires **climate stress testing of infrastructure, diversification of water sources, and redundancy in service delivery.**

**3. Fragile adaptation finance:** Global discussions aim to mobilise **\$1.3 trillion annually by 2035** for climate adaptation, but **clear operational pathways remain uncertain.**

**4. Risk to long-term resilience investments:** Without predictable finance, **post-disaster recovery spending may crowd out long-term resilience planning.**

**5. Digital fragmentation in water governance:** Despite vast **hydrological and meteorological data**, **Artificial Intelligence-driven real-time integration into planning and governance systems remains limited.**

## Way Forward

- 1. Alignment of global indicators with domestic missions:** Many global adaptation targets already correspond with Indian initiatives on **drinking water coverage, sanitation expansion, irrigation efficiency, urban water reforms, and climate action plans.**
- 2. Integration of climate indicators into governance dashboards:** **Climate stress indicators must be embedded into mission dashboards** across ministries and states to guide climate-resilient policy implementation.
- 3. Leveraging digital public infrastructure:** India's digital capacity can integrate **hydrological data, crop advisories, insurance systems, and financial flows** into interoperable platforms.
- 4. Promoting real-time climate decision-making:** Integrated digital platforms can support **real-time planning, budgeting, and local governance decisions** during climate stress.
- 5. Focus on convergence rather than reinvention:** Effective climate adaptation requires **coordination and integration of existing missions instead of creating new programmes.**

## Conclusion

The **Belém Adaptation Indicators** function as a **dashboard for climate survival**, turning adaptation into a measurable development strategy. **Water must anchor climate action.** With existing reforms, technological capacity, and community initiatives, India can operationalise climate resilience at scale. Aligning **missions, metrics, and finance** will help India strengthen resilience and demonstrate leadership in climate adaptation across the **Global South.**

## Question for practice:

Discuss how water has emerged as a central pillar of climate resilience in global climate governance, and examine India's institutional initiatives and challenges in building water-centred climate adaptation.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Oil prices reflect geopolitical risks, not only supply

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-International relation And GS Paper 3- Infrastructure

## Introduction

Crude oil prices surged sharply after the war in West Asia, reaching **\$118 per barrel**, while Brent crude rose from **\$57.56 in mid-December 2025**, more than doubling within two months. Prices remain above three digits with no immediate easing. This situation shows that oil prices are now shaped strongly by **geopolitical tensions, maritime risks, and financial market reactions**, not only by the physical balance of supply and demand in global energy markets.

## Geopolitical Transformation of the Global Oil Market

- 1. Return of geopolitics to the energy debate:** Conflicts in West Asia, rising rivalry among major powers, and persistent uncertainty have brought geopolitics back to the centre of global energy discussions.
- 2. Shift in the nature of geopolitical influence:** Earlier regional conflicts rarely removed Gulf oil from global markets. Current disruptions create **real barriers to supply**, changing trade conditions and market confidence.
- 3. Oil security expanding beyond physical access:** For importing countries such as India, oil security now includes **financial, logistical, and political uncertainties** around every shipment.
- 4. Strategic importance of maritime chokepoints:** Around **20% of global oil consumption moves through the Strait of Hormuz**, while **10% of seaborne crude passes through the Bab el-Mandeb–Suez corridor**.
- 5. Conflict affecting global supply circulation:** The conflict involving **Israel and Iran has sidelined about 20% of global supplies**, increasing disruption risks.
- 6. Growing market sensitivity to geopolitical signals:** **Brent crude fluctuated by 5–10% within days of military or diplomatic developments**, showing strong geopolitical influence.

#### **Mechanisms Driving Oil Price Volatility**

- 1. Maritime insecurity affecting trade routes:** Rising tensions make key shipping routes vulnerable, and even limited attacks on commercial vessels can **force rerouting of tankers and disrupt oil transportation**.
- 2. Rising shipping costs and war-risk premiums:** Daily rates for **supertankers have more than doubled**, shipping insurance premiums have increased, and container carriers imposed **conflict and war-risk surcharges** due to insecurity in major maritime routes.
- 3. Supply chain pressure raising landed import prices:** Higher freight charges, insurance costs, and tighter vessel availability increase **the final price of oil imports for consuming countries**.
- 4. Oil evolving into a geopolitical instrument:** Oil trade increasingly reflects political strategy, illustrated by the **redirection of Russian crude toward Asian markets after the Ukraine conflict**.
- 5. Operational complexity in oil trade networks:** Russian exports continued in volume but required **longer shipping routes, complex payment systems, and evolving compliance frameworks**, increasing financial and operational risks.
- 6. Weakening link between supply levels and prices:** Oil prices now respond rapidly to **diplomatic signals, military developments, and regulatory announcements**, reducing the traditional connection between production and prices.
- 7. Financial markets amplifying price movements:** Oil is traded as a financial asset through **futures, options, and derivatives**, allowing investors to treat oil as an **inflation hedge and risk-sensitive instrument during crises**.
- 8. Speculation influencing market behaviour:** Speculative investment often expands even when inventories are comfortable, meaning **prices reflect expectations and portfolio strategies rather than immediate scarcity**.

## Global Responses to Market Instability

- 1. Strategic Petroleum Reserves addressing market anxiety:** Strategic Petroleum Reserves were originally designed to counter supply disruptions but are now used to **stabilise market sentiment during geopolitical crises**.
- 2. G-7 release aimed at calming markets:** G-7 leaders announced the release of **400 million barrels of oil**, equivalent to about **20 days of usual oil traffic through the Strait of Hormuz**.
- 3. Reserve announcements influencing market reactions:** News about potential reserve releases triggered **sell-offs in oil markets**, easing gains in Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate.
- 4. United States shaping global oil dynamics:** The **United States, one of the largest petroleum producers**, influences markets through strategic reserves and diplomatic engagement with oil-producing nations.
- 5. Asia becoming the centre of demand growth:** Asia accounts for **most of the increase in global oil consumption over the past decade**, making it a major driver of future demand.
- 6. Producer coordination influencing supply management:** Organisations such as the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** continue to affect supply decisions, though their influence now interacts with geopolitical risk premiums.

## Implications for India's Energy Security

- 1. India emerging as a key demand centre:** India's oil demand is **not expected to peak soon** and will contribute significantly to future global consumption growth.
- 2. Diversified sourcing reducing supply risks:** The ability to **import crude from multiple regions and process different crude grades** helps India reduce dependence on any single supplier.
- 3. Strategic reserves strengthening resilience:** Maintaining **Strategic Petroleum Reserves** provides protection against sudden disruptions caused by geopolitical tensions.
- 4. Need for advanced commercial and financial capabilities:** Complex global oil trade requires **expertise in trading systems, payment arrangements, and financial management**.
- 5. Energy policy integrating diplomacy and maritime awareness:** Effective energy strategy must combine **diplomatic engagement, maritime monitoring, and market analytics**.
- 6. Expanded definition of energy security:** Energy security now includes resilience against **financial disruptions, shipping risks, and contractual uncertainties**, not only physical supply shortages.

## Conclusion

Global oil markets have entered a phase where **geopolitical risk influences prices as strongly as supply conditions**. Maritime security, financial trading, and political tensions shape price behaviour. Energy security now depends on managing **logistical, financial, and diplomatic risks**. Stability will rely on maintaining **predictable trade mechanisms and avoiding geopolitical ruptures that disrupt global oil flows**.

**Question for practice:**

Examine how geopolitical tensions are increasingly influencing global oil prices beyond traditional supply-demand factors, and discuss the implications for energy security in importing countries such as India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

**Transgender Rights Amendment Bill**

Source: The post “**Transgender Rights Amendment Bill**” has been created, based on “**Transgender Rights Amendment Bill: Key Changes to 2019 Act Explained**” published in “Indian Express” on 17th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

**Context:** The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 was enacted in line with the Supreme Court’s judgment in National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India (2014), which recognised transgender persons as the third gender and affirmed the right to self-identification. The 2026 Amendment Bill introduces significant changes that alter the foundational principles of the 2019 framework.

**Key Changes Proposed in the 2026 Amendment**

**1. Narrower Definition of Transgender**

- The amendment restricts the definition of transgender persons to those belonging to specific socio-cultural groups and those with certain congenital biological variations.
- It removes the earlier inclusive and umbrella-based definition that covered diverse gender identities.

**2. Removal of Right to Self-Identification**

- The amendment deletes the provision that allowed individuals to self-identify their gender.
- It replaces self-identification with a more controlled and restrictive recognition mechanism.

**3. Introduction of Medical Certification**

- The amendment mandates the creation of a medical board to evaluate and recommend gender identity certification.
- It introduces clinical assessment as a prerequisite for legal recognition.

**4. Creation of a Separate Category**

- The bill introduces a category for persons forced into transgender identity through coercion or harmful procedures.
- This aims to address exploitation but adds a new classification within the law.

**5. Institutional Changes**

- The amendment formalises the role of medical boards led by senior officers.
- It also prescribes higher-ranking officials as representatives in the National Council.

## 6. Enhanced Penal Provisions

- The amendment introduces stricter punishments, including long-term imprisonment for severe offences.
- It provides differentiated penalties for crimes against adults and children.

## Implications of the Amendment

### Positive Implications

- The amendment strengthens legal provisions against exploitation and coercion of vulnerable individuals.
- It introduces stricter penalties that may act as a deterrent against serious offences.
- It attempts to bring administrative clarity through structured institutional mechanisms.

### Negative Implications

- The amendment undermines the right to self-identification recognised by the Supreme Court.
- It medicalises gender identity by making recognition dependent on clinical approval.
- It excludes many individuals who do not fall within narrow socio-cultural or biological categories.
- It creates procedural barriers due to reliance on medical boards and documentation.
- It shifts the approach from a rights-based framework to a restrictive and eligibility-based system.

## Way Forward

### 1. Restore the Principle of Self-Identification

- The law should reinstate the right to self-identification as affirmed by the Supreme Court.
- Any regulatory mechanism should not override individual autonomy and dignity.

### 2. Adopt a Balanced Certification Framework

- The certification process should remain primarily administrative with optional medical support rather than mandatory medical approval.
- Safeguards can be introduced without making medical evaluation compulsory.

### 3. Ensure Inclusivity in Definition

- The definition of transgender persons should remain broad and inclusive to cover all gender-diverse identities.
- It should avoid limiting recognition to specific socio-cultural or biological categories.

### 4. Strengthen Anti-Discrimination Measures

- The focus should be on preventing discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, and public access.
- Implementation mechanisms should be strengthened rather than restricting eligibility.

### 5. Improve Accessibility and Sensitisation

- The government should ensure that institutions, especially healthcare systems, are sensitised to transgender issues.
- Awareness programmes should be conducted to reduce stigma and social barriers.

#### 6. Engage with Community Stakeholders

- Policymaking should involve consultations with transgender persons and advocacy groups.
- This will ensure that laws reflect lived realities and practical challenges.

**Conclusion:** The 2026 Amendment Bill introduces important protections against exploitation but raises serious concerns regarding autonomy and inclusivity. A balanced approach that safeguards both dignity and protection is essential to uphold constitutional values and human rights.

**Question:** In light of the National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India, critically examine the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026. Discuss its implications on autonomy and inclusivity.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

### Oil shock's impact on India's BoP

**Source:** The post "Oil shock's impact on India's BoP" has been created, based on "Oil shock's impact on India's BoP" published in "BusinessLine" on 17th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-3- International relations

**Context:** India is highly dependent on crude oil imports, especially from the Gulf region, making it vulnerable to global oil shocks. The recent conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has disrupted global oil supply and increased prices. This has significant implications for India's Balance of Payments.

#### Causes of the Oil Shock

1. The conflict has damaged Iran's oil production capacity, which reduces global supply.
2. Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz disrupts a major global oil transit route.
3. Attacks on oil facilities in the Gulf region have created uncertainty in supply chains.
4. Speculative activities by global trading firms have amplified price volatility.

#### Channels of Impact on India's BoP

**1. Increase in Oil Import Bill:** India imports a large share of its crude oil requirements, so higher global prices directly increase the import bill. This leads to a higher outflow of foreign exchange.

**2. Worsening Trade Balance:** The rise in oil import costs increases total imports significantly. Since exports do not increase proportionately, the trade deficit widens.

**3. Imported Inflation and Currency Depreciation:** Higher oil prices increase transportation and production costs across sectors. This leads to inflation in the domestic economy. Inflation and increased demand for foreign exchange contribute to depreciation of the rupee.

**4. Pressure on Current Account Deficit:** The widening trade deficit directly increases the current account deficit. A higher current account deficit weakens external sector stability.

**5. Decline in Remittances:** Economic disruptions in Gulf countries may reduce employment and income of Indian workers. This leads to a decline in remittance inflows, which are an important source of foreign exchange.

**6. Reduction in Refined Petroleum Exports:** India exports refined petroleum products using imported crude oil. In case of shortages, crude oil may be diverted for domestic use. This reduces export earnings from the petroleum sector.

**7. Structural Vulnerability due to Non-Oil Imports:** Non-oil imports such as gold and other goods have been rising rapidly. The oil shock adds to this existing pressure on the trade balance.

## Way Forward

### 1. Diversification of Energy Sources

- India should diversify its sources of crude oil imports to reduce dependence on any single region.
- It should also promote renewable energy to reduce long-term reliance on fossil fuels.

### 2. Expansion of Strategic Petroleum Reserves

- The government should expand strategic reserves to manage supply disruptions.
- These reserves can be used to stabilise domestic supply during crises.

### 3. Rationalisation of Imports

- Non-essential imports such as gold should be regulated during periods of crisis.
- Policies should encourage domestic production to reduce import dependence.

### 4. Promotion of Exports

- India should strengthen its export sectors, especially services and manufacturing.
- Increased exports can help offset the higher import bill.

### 5. Exchange Rate and Monetary Management

- The central bank should take steps to prevent excessive currency volatility.
- Maintaining adequate foreign exchange reserves is essential.

### 6. International Engagement

- India should engage with oil-producing countries to secure stable supply agreements.
- Cooperation with global institutions can help manage crisis situations.

**Conclusion:** The oil price shock affects India's Balance of Payments through multiple channels including trade, inflation, and capital flows. A combination of short-term policy responses and long-term structural reforms is necessary to reduce vulnerability to such external shocks.

**Question:** An oil price shock can significantly impact India's Balance of Payments (BoP). Analyse the channels through which a global oil crisis affects India's external sector.

Source: [Businessline](#)

## Why India Must Electrify Its Kitchens

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

### Introduction

India spends **\$26.4 billion annually on LPG imports**, mostly through vulnerable supply routes. It has **332 million LPG connections**, yet **37% households still rely on firewood and dung**. The cost dynamics have changed, as **electric cooking is now cheaper than unsubsidised LPG**. This creates a strong case for transition. However, shifting millions of kitchens to electricity raises issues of **grid capacity, peak demand, and cost management**, making the transition complex and policy-sensitive.

### Why the Existing LPG-Based Model is Becoming Unsustainable

- 1. Rising import dependence and cost burden:** India imports **60% of LPG and 50% of natural gas**, pushing the import bill to **\$26.4 billion in FY25, a 50% increase in six years**.
- 2. Rapid expansion without sustainability:** LPG connections increased from **150 million (2015) to 332 million (2025)**, but this expansion depends on imports and subsidies.
- 3. Incomplete clean cooking transition:** Despite wide LPG coverage, **37% households still use traditional fuels**, showing limited sustained adoption.

### Why Electric Cooking is Emerging as a Better Alternative

- 1. Strong cost advantage:** Electric cooking is **37% cheaper than non-subsidised LPG** and **14% cheaper than piped natural gas**, making it economically viable.
- 2. Higher energy efficiency:** Induction cooktops achieve **85% efficiency**, while LPG burners deliver only **40% efficiency**, leading to better energy use.
- 3. Lower fiscal burden compared to subsidies:** Only heavily subsidised LPG under PMUY is cheaper, but it requires **thousands of crores annually**, increasing fiscal pressure.
- 4. Superior appliance efficiency:** Electric pressure cookers use **less energy than any other tested cooking device**, improving overall efficiency.

### Challenges in Transitioning to Electric Cooking

- 1. Mismatch with Indian cooking practices:** Indian cooking requires **multi-pot use and high heat**, which standard single-plate induction units cannot handle.

**2. Technology gaps limiting adoption:** Lack of **multi-pot and flame-like induction systems** explains the low **5% share of electric cooking in 2021**.

**3. High upfront cost and low awareness:** Initial cost of induction devices and utensils discourages adoption, along with limited consumer awareness.

**4. Cultural resistance to non-flame cooking:** Preference for flame-based cooking persists, though **fuel stacking** offers gradual transition.

### Impact on Power System and Peak Demand Pressure

**1. Rising peak electricity demand:** Peak demand increased from **148 GW in 2014 to 242.5 GW in 2025**, with strong evening peaks between **9–11 p.m.**

**2. High cost of peak power procurement:** Electricity prices rise from **₹3.5 to ₹9–10 per unit** during peak hours, increasing discom costs.

**3. Risk of outages and load shedding:** When demand exceeds supply, discoms use costly options or impose **planned power cuts**, affecting economic activity.

**4. Additional stress from mass e-cooking:** Large-scale induction use during peak hours can **increase peak load and risk grid instability**.

### Way Forward

**1. Smart demand response using OpenADR:** Automated systems can reduce peak demand, with pilots achieving **14% peak reduction** and potential **7% nationwide impact**.

**2. Developing smart grid infrastructure:** Need for **OpenADR systems, smart meters, and aggregator platforms** to manage distributed loads.

**3. Strengthening distribution capacity:** Upgrade household load from **3 kW to 5 kW** and invest in transformers and feeder systems.

**4. Promoting rooftop solar and storage:** Solar with batteries allows households to store energy and use it during peak cooking hours, reducing grid stress.

**5. Enabling peer-to-peer energy trading:** P2P trading reduced electricity cost by **43% in pilot projects**, helping flatten local demand.

**6. Reforming subsidy and pricing policies:** Redirect **₹40,000 crore LPG subsidy** to support e-cooking and introduce time-of-use tariffs.

**7. Supporting technology and regulatory push:** Invest in **multi-pot induction R&D**, promote efficient appliances, and mandate all-electric buildings.

### Conclusion

Electrifying kitchens reduces dependence on imported fuels and shifts India towards domestic energy use. It improves efficiency, lowers costs, and supports sustainability goals. However, the transition requires careful planning to manage grid stress. With strong policy support, smart technology, and infrastructure upgrades, electric cooking can become a reliable and future-ready solution for clean cooking in India.

**Question for practice:**

Examine how the shift from LPG-based cooking to electric cooking can improve affordability, energy efficiency, and energy security in India, while creating challenges for the power grid.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

**Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) as a Test of a New Model of Forest Finance**

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3-Environment

**Introduction**

The Belém Climate Summit (2025) highlighted a key issue in forest conservation: finance alone is not enough without power shift. Despite commitments since 1992, funding for tropical forests has remained inadequate. Forests declined by **8% between 2002 and 2022**, showing failure of existing models. **The Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF)** was introduced as a new model to correct incentives and support long-term conservation.

**What is New Forest Finance Model (TFFF)?**

- 1. TFFF as a payment for standing forests:** The TFFF pays countries for maintaining forests, not just reducing deforestation, shifting focus from damage control to preservation.
- 2. Shift from traditional finance:** The TFFF moves away from grant-based systems and uses a return-generating mechanism, making conservation an investment.
- 3. Blended finance structure:** It aims to raise **\$125 billion**, combining public and private funds, unlike traditional grant-based systems.
- 4. Performance-based system:** Payments depend on keeping deforestation below **0.5%**, measured using satellite monitoring.
- 5. Return-generating mechanism:** The fund invests capital to generate **\$3–4 billion annually**, ensuring long-term financial flow.
- 6. Global participation framework:** It includes **74 developing countries** with over **1 billion hectares of forests**, expanding global coverage.

**Positive Features of the TFFF Model**

- 1. Correcting economic incentives:** It aims to make conservation financially attractive compared to deforestation, addressing the core economic problem.

2. **Large-scale financial ambition:** The **\$125 billion target** shows potential to transform forest finance at a global level.
3. **Support for indigenous communities:** At least **20% of funds** are reserved for local and indigenous communities, recognising their role.
4. **Direct access and decision role:** Communities may directly access funds and influence usage, improving local control.
5. **Participatory design process:** More than **400 community leaders** were involved in consultations, ensuring representation.
6. **Transparency and accountability:** Countries must disclose fund usage, allowing public scrutiny and feedback.
7. **Use of modern technology:** Satellite-based monitoring ensures consistent and credible measurement of forest cover.
8. **Institutional support platform:** A digital platform was launched with **UNDP, FAO, WWF, and GATC** to provide technical assistance and capacity building.

#### Major Issues in Forest Finance Model

1. **Inadequate financial valuation:** Payments of around **\$4 per hectare** may not reflect the full value of ecosystem services.
2. **Distributional issues:** Funds may be absorbed by governments or intermediaries, limiting direct benefits to indigenous and local communities.
3. **Weak decision-making power:** Indigenous groups lack voting rights in governance bodies, reducing true participation.
4. **Market-driven approach concerns:** Focus on financial returns may ignore root causes like agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure expansion.
5. **Limited focus on degradation:** Current design mainly considers fire damage, ignoring other forms like logging and mining.
6. **Deforestation leakage risk:** Forest loss may shift to other regions not covered under the model.
7. **Criticism from civil society:** The **Global Forest Coalition (GFC)** called the model “colonialistic” and argued that it may benefit intermediaries more than forest peoples.

#### Broader Political Economy of Forest Finance

1. **Economic drivers of deforestation:** Clearing forests for agriculture and timber remains more profitable than conservation.
2. **Failure of past commitments:** Since 1992, global promises on forest finance have largely remained unmet.

3. **Global demand and subsidies:** Commodity demand and harmful subsidies continue to push deforestation.
4. **Weak governance systems:** Poor and corrupt forest governance accelerates forest loss.
5. **Power imbalance in conservation:** Indigenous communities often lack control despite being key protectors of forests.
6. **Land rights as central issue:** Without secure land rights, conservation finance cannot ensure long-term protection.
7. **Global funding commitments:** The **Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP)** pledged **\$1.8 billion (2026–2030)** for indigenous and local communities.
8. **Link between climate justice and conservation:** Conservation efforts must integrate community governance and human rights.

### Way Forward

1. **Increase global financial commitments:** Countries must contribute more to reach the **\$25 billion initial capital** and full funding target.
2. **Improve valuation of forests:** Payments should reflect the true ecological and economic value of forests.
3. **Strengthen monitoring systems:** Use better satellite data and include degradation beyond fire damage.
4. **Ensure equitable distribution:** Build strong local institutions to ensure funds reach communities directly.
5. **Enhance governance and participation:** Provide real decision-making power and ensure continuous consultation with communities.
6. **Prevent leakage and ensure coverage:** Expand monitoring to include other ecosystems and prevent displacement of deforestation.

### Conclusion:

The TFFF is a bold step to transform forest finance and align incentives with conservation. However, its success depends on **adequate funding, fair distribution, strong governance, and real community participation**. Without addressing structural drivers and power imbalances, it may not deliver lasting results. Belém thus serves as a critical test of whether forest finance can truly support sustainable conservation.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) represents a new model of forest finance and examine its key features, challenges, and broader implications for forest conservation.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Prison outbreak: On the health crisis in India's prisons

**Source:** The post “Prison outbreak: On the health crisis in India's prisons” has been created, based on “Prison outbreak: On the health crisis in India's prisons” published in “BusinessLine” on 18th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Governance

**Context:** Indian prisons are facing a serious public health crisis due to overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and inadequate healthcare services. This situation persists despite the recognition of prisoners' right to health under Article 21 of the Constitution. Recent disease outbreaks in prisons highlight systemic neglect and significant governance gaps.

### Evidence of Health Crisis

1. The herpes simplex virus (HSV) outbreak in Jalpaiguri Central Correctional Home during 2025–26 infected around 92 inmates and led to 7 deaths, indicating the severity of health risks in prisons.
2. Prisoners in India are nearly five times more likely to contract tuberculosis compared to the general population, reflecting poor living conditions.
3. The prevalence of HIV among inmates is also higher than the national average due to inadequate screening and unsafe practices.
4. In Kerala prisons in 2023, nearly 30% of inmates were found to be suffering from skin diseases caused by overcrowding and lack of hygiene.
5. Earlier, major COVID-19 outbreaks in Nagpur and Indore central jails demonstrated the vulnerability of prisons to infectious diseases.

### Causes of Health Crisis

#### 1. Overcrowding

- a. Indian prisons frequently operate at occupancy rates of 150–170% or even higher, which severely strains existing infrastructure.
- b. In extreme cases, such as Kandi Sub-Jail, occupancy levels have exceeded 400%, making basic living conditions extremely poor.
- c. Overcrowding leads to lack of personal space, poor sanitation, and the inability to isolate infected individuals, thereby accelerating the spread of diseases.

#### 2. Weak Healthcare Infrastructure

- a. There is a significant shortage of medical personnel, with about 43% of medical officer positions lying vacant in prisons.
- b. The inmate-to-doctor ratio is approximately 2.6 times higher than the recommended standards, leading to inadequate medical attention.
- c. Mental health services are also severely lacking, with only 25 psychologists available for around 5.7 lakh inmates.
- d. The absence of proper screening facilities and emergency care further aggravates the health crisis.

#### 3. Poor Prison Conditions

- a. Many prisons suffer from unventilated and congested barracks, which create an unhealthy living environment.
- b. Sanitation facilities and access to clean water are often inadequate, increasing the risk of infections.
- c. Delayed diagnosis and treatment of illnesses further worsen inmates' health conditions.
- d. Poor nutrition among inmates also contributes to weakened immunity.

#### 4. Systemic and Legal Issues

- a. Undertrial prisoners constitute the majority of the prison population, reflecting inefficiencies in the judicial system.
- b. Delays in trials result in prolonged incarceration, contributing significantly to overcrowding.
- c. There is excessive reliance on imprisonment even for minor offences, which increases the burden on prisons.
- d. Alternatives such as bail, plea bargaining, and non-custodial punishments are not adequately utilized.

#### Implications

1. Prisons become breeding grounds for infectious diseases due to overcrowding and poor hygiene conditions.
2. There is a high risk of disease transmission to the general population through prison staff and visitors.
3. The situation amounts to a violation of the fundamental right to life and health under Article 21.
4. It also undermines human dignity and places an additional burden on the public health system.

#### Steps Taken

1. The Ministry of Home Affairs in 2025 directed the organization of tuberculosis screening camps in prisons to detect and control infections.
2. Some states, such as West Bengal in 2020, temporarily released undertrial prisoners to reduce overcrowding.
3. The Model Prison Manual provides guidelines for healthcare, sanitation, and staffing in prisons, although its implementation remains inconsistent across states.

#### Way Forward

**1. Decongestion of Prisons:** The government should ensure the fast-tracking of cases involving undertrial prisoners to reduce unnecessary detention. Greater emphasis should be placed on bail reforms, plea bargaining, and non-custodial punishments such as community service and fines.

**2. Strengthening Healthcare:** Prisons should be integrated with the National Health Mission to improve healthcare delivery. Vacancies for doctors, nurses, and psychologists must be filled on priority. Mandatory health screening at the time of entry and regular medical check-ups should be ensured.

**3. Infrastructure Improvement:** Efforts should be made to improve ventilation, sanitation, and water supply in prisons. Dedicated isolation wards should be established to manage infectious diseases effectively. Disease surveillance systems should be strengthened within prison settings.

**4. Governance and Institutional Reforms:** The provisions of the Model Prison Manual should be implemented uniformly across all states. Telemedicine services and digital health records should be introduced

to improve access to healthcare. Regular inspections and accountability mechanisms should be institutionalized.

**5. Special Measures:** The repatriation of foreign prisoners should be expedited to reduce overcrowding. Prison staff should be trained in managing health emergencies and disease outbreaks. Coordination between health departments and prison authorities should be strengthened.

**Conclusion:** The health crisis in Indian prisons reflects deeper structural issues in governance, the criminal justice system, and public health management. A comprehensive and coordinated approach focusing on decongestion, healthcare strengthening, and systemic reforms is essential to uphold prisoners' rights and prevent prisons from becoming centres of disease transmission.

**Question:** "Overcrowding in Indian prisons has transformed them into public health hazards." Discuss with reference to recent outbreaks and suggest reforms.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### India's West Asia reset — more sinned against than sinning

**Source:** The post "India's West Asia reset — more sinned against than sinning" has been created, based on "India's West Asia reset — more sinned against than sinning" published in "The Hindu" on 18th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- International Relations

**Context:** India's West Asia policy is undergoing a strategic reset in response to changing geopolitical realities in the region. This new approach emphasizes realism, hard diplomacy, and the prioritisation of national interests over traditional ideological positions. However, the shift has also generated debate regarding its balance and long-term implications.

### Background: Growing Importance of West Asia for India

1. West Asia, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has emerged as India's largest socio-economic partner.
2. India has significantly increased its diplomatic engagement in the region over the past decade through high-level visits and strategic agreements.
3. India's bilateral trade with the region exceeds \$160 billion, reflecting deep economic interdependence.
4. The presence of nearly 10 million Indians in the region makes diaspora welfare a key concern for India's foreign policy.
5. India has also signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with the United Arab Emirates and Oman, further strengthening economic ties.

### Features of India's West Asia Reset

1. **Shift to Hard Diplomacy:** India has adopted a more clear-sighted and interest-driven diplomatic approach in the region. It is increasingly avoiding vague or overly balanced statements that previously limited its strategic influence.

2. **Strategic Assertion and Autonomy:** India is now expressing its positions independently without relying on external validation or third-party references. This reflects growing confidence as an autonomous and credible global actor.
3. **Stronger Engagement with Key Players:** India has strengthened its engagement with Israel in areas such as defence and technology cooperation. It continues to deepen ties with GCC countries for energy security, trade, and diaspora protection. At the same time, India maintains engagement with Iran due to its importance in energy and connectivity initiatives.
4. **De-hyphenation Policy:** India has moved away from viewing its relations with Israel and Palestine as interlinked or mutually restrictive. It now engages with each country based on bilateral interests and strategic priorities.

### Drivers Behind the Reset

1. **Changing Regional Geopolitics:** The region has witnessed significant instability and conflict, especially after developments since 2023. The traditional U.S.-led security framework in West Asia is weakening, necessitating new alignments.
2. **Security Concerns of Gulf States:** GCC countries are increasingly facing threats such as missile and drone attacks and disruptions in key maritime routes like the Strait of Hormuz. These developments have pushed them to seek diversified and reliable security partnerships.
3. **India's Expanding Interests:** India's growing energy needs make the region crucial for its energy security. Expanding trade, investment opportunities, and diaspora welfare further deepen India's stakes in the region. India also seeks a stronger strategic presence to enhance its global role.

### Criticism of the Reset

1. **Timing and Optics:** India's high-level engagement with Israel coincided with escalating regional tensions, raising concerns about diplomatic timing and perception.
2. **Perceived Abandonment of Traditional Positions:** Critics argue that India's policy reflects a dilution of its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause and balanced engagement with Iran.
3. **Strategic Overreach:** There are concerns that increased activism in the region may expose India to security risks and costly defence commitments.
4. **Concerns over Autonomy:** Some critics believe that India's approach may align too closely with Western or U.S. strategic interests.

### Counter-Arguments

1. India's policy shift is rooted in pragmatism and is aligned with its national interests rather than ideological considerations.
2. Other major powers such as China, Russia, and Pakistan have also pursued interest-based policies in the region.
3. India continues to maintain a multi-vector engagement strategy, balancing its relations with all key stakeholders.

### Emerging Opportunities for India

1. **Diversification of Security Partnerships:** GCC countries may reduce their dependence on the United States and look for alternative partners such as India. This presents an opportunity for India to emerge as a credible and reliable security partner.

2. **Economic Opportunities:** Instability in the GCC region may encourage global investors to explore India as an alternative economic hub. India can leverage this opportunity to attract capital and talent.
3. **Strategic Leverage:** India's balanced engagement with Israel, Iran, and Arab countries enhances its role as a regional stabiliser. This also strengthens India's position in global geopolitics.

### Way Forward

1. **Maintain Strategic Balance:** India should continue engaging with Israel, GCC countries, Iran, and Palestine in a balanced manner. It must avoid excessive alignment with any one bloc.
2. **Flexible and Agile Diplomacy:** India should adopt a dynamic approach to respond effectively to rapidly changing regional developments. It should keep its diplomatic options open.
3. **Humanitarian and Soft Power Role:** India should increase humanitarian assistance during regional conflicts to build goodwill. This will enhance its image as a responsible global actor.
4. **Careful Security Engagement:** India should undertake defence partnerships only after careful cost-benefit analysis. Clear rules of engagement must be established to avoid strategic overreach.

**Conclusion:** India's West Asia reset represents a mature and pragmatic shift towards interest-based diplomacy. However, sustaining long-term gains will require a careful balance of consistency, sensitivity, and strategic agility in a highly volatile region.

**Question:** "India's recent 'reset' in West Asia reflects a shift towards pragmatic and interest-based diplomacy." Critically examine.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### A bit of a blur over India's new carbon credit plan

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3-Environment

#### Introduction

The **Union Budget 2026** announced a ₹20,000 crore carbon credit programme, creating confusion about its purpose. One view links it to industrial **Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS)**, while another sees it as income support for farmers. Official evidence supports the industrial focus, but a parallel narrative has led to uncertainty and mixed expectations.

#### What is DST's (Department of Science and Technology) CCUS Roadmap

1. **What is CCUS:** It is a process of capturing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from industrial sources, transporting it, and then using it or storing it underground to prevent its release into the atmosphere.
2. **Policy basis and intent:** The programme is based on the **DST's CCUS roadmap (Dec 2025)**, which clearly defines its industrial focus and technical scope.
3. **Target sectors:** It focuses on **hard-to-abate industries** such as power, steel, cement, refineries, and chemicals where emissions are concentrated and measurable.

**4. Nature of emissions:** These sectors have **process emissions that are difficult to reduce through renewable energy alone**, making them key targets.

**5. Financial allocation:** The ₹20,000 crore over five years is meant for large-scale deployment of CCUS technologies.

**6. Technology focus:** It aims at **large-scale deployment of technologies to capture CO<sub>2</sub> from industrial sources and manage it effectively**.

### Exclusion of Agriculture

**1. Not part of CCUS sectors:** Agriculture is not included in the roadmap's target sectors, showing a clear boundary of the programme.

**2. Nature of agricultural emissions:** Agricultural emissions are **diffuse and biologically mediated, mainly methane and nitrous oxide**.

**3. Technical limitation:** These emissions are **not suitable for point-source capture technology, which is central to CCUS**.

**4. Conceptual distinction:** The roadmap separates CCUS (industrial emission prevention) from CDR (removal of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>).

**5. Role of agriculture in CDR:** Agriculture contributes through soil carbon sequestration, biochar, and agroforestry, but this is outside CCUS.

### What are the concerns with DST's CCUS Roadmap

**1. Terminology confusion:** The use of the term "carbon credit programme" **created ambiguity about the scheme's actual scope**.

**2. Conflation of concepts:** There is **confusion between CCUS (industrial carbon capture) and voluntary carbon markets** (agriculture-based credits).

**3. Media-driven narrative:** Reports and discourse promoted the **idea of farmers earning carbon credits from this fund**, which is **not accurate**.

**4. Communication gap:** The technical clarity of the roadmap was not matched by clear public communication, leading to misinterpretation.

**5. Expectation mismatch:** The mention of a "programme" led to expectations of a funded scheme for farmers, which is not part of this allocation.

### What are the opportunities

**1. Growing carbon market demand:** There is **rising global and domestic demand for nature-based carbon credits**, especially from agriculture.

2. **Existing pilot initiatives:** Private sector and State-level projects are already testing models where farmers earn from sustainable practices.

3. **Scope for soil carbon enhancement:** Practices that improve soil organic carbon can generate measurable benefits and credits.

4. **Policy readiness:** The Agriculture Ministry has been working on soil health and climate-resilient farming, creating a base for future policy.

5. **Potential income source:** A structured framework can create a new income stream for farmers, aligning climate action with livelihoods.

### Way Forward

1. **Ensure policy clarity and effective communication:** The confusion shows a gap between technical design and public understanding, so there must be a clear separation between CCUS (industry) and carbon farming (agriculture), along with precise communication to avoid misinterpretation.

2. **Develop a separate policy framework for agriculture:** The absence of a structured agricultural carbon system highlights the need for dedicated institutions, funding, and mechanisms for carbon farming.

3. **Align policy with emerging narrative:** The growing farmer-centric climate narrative should be aligned with actual policy design to prevent mismatch between perception and reality.

4. **Adopt a parallel strategy:** Both industrial decarbonisation and agricultural carbon sequestration should be promoted through separate but coordinated approaches.

### Conclusion

The ₹20,000 crore programme clearly targets **industrial decarbonisation through CCUS**, not agriculture. At the same time, agriculture offers a strong but separate opportunity in carbon markets. India needs a **dual-track approach**, with clear policy separation and equal focus on industry and farming, to ensure effective climate action and avoid confusion.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the confusion surrounding India's ₹20,000 crore carbon credit programme announced in Union Budget 2026, and explain its actual focus, concerns, opportunities, and the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## On scientific collaborations in BRICS

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-International Relations

### Introduction

BRICS is a major global grouping with strong share in global GDP, population, natural resources, and scientific capacity. It promotes a multipolar system and reduces dependence on Western dominance. In a time of geopolitical tensions, sanctions, and techno-nationalism, cooperation in **science, technology, and innovation (STI)** has become important, though it remains less visible than economic cooperation within BRICS.

### Evolution of STI Cooperation in BRICS

- 1. Formal recognition and institutional base:** STI cooperation became formal in **2011** and was strengthened by the **2015 memorandum**, which made it a core pillar with a clear institutional framework.
- 2. Framework Programme and funding mechanism:** The **2016 BRICS STI Framework Programme** created a system for multilateral R&D projects, requiring at least three member countries and involving national funding agencies.
- 3. Action Plan and working group structure:** The **2017–2020 Action Plan** assigned implementation to **the Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Partnership (STIEP) Working Group**, focusing on structured collaboration and programme execution.
- 4. Shift towards innovation and technology transfer:** Early focus on basic science shifted to **innovation, entrepreneurship, business incubators, and technology transfer**, including youth and women participation.
- 5. Ministerial coordination and national agencies:** Annual STI Minister meetings approve plans, while agencies like the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)** and the **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** coordinate project calls and implementation at the national level.
- 6. Technology platforms and limited commercialisation:** Initiatives like **iBRICS and TTC** created policy links for technology transfer, but **large-scale commercialisation remains limited**.

### Emerging Areas and Sectoral Focus of STI Cooperation

- 1. Transition to development-oriented sectors:** Focus moved to **energy, water, health, and environment**, reflecting shared development challenges of member countries.
- 2. COVID-19 driven priority shift:** The pandemic increased focus on **public health, vaccines, biosecurity, and digital health**, making STI cooperation more urgent and practical.
- 3. Inclusion of advanced and frontier technologies:** Recent calls include **Artificial Intelligence (AI), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), High-Performance Computing (HPC), advanced materials, and space technologies**, showing a shift to high-end scientific collaboration.
- 4. Sectoral progress remains uneven:** Strong progress is seen in **ICT, HPC, and space cooperation**, but **mega-science projects and ocean or polar research are slow** due to high infrastructure needs.
- 5. Growing importance of AI governance:** The **2025 AI Declaration** made AI a central pillar, promoting **inclusive and development-oriented governance frameworks**.

### BRICS+ Expansion and Strategic Shift

- 1. Expansion into BRICS+ platform:** BRICS, a grouping of major emerging economies (**Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**), expanded in 2022 to include **Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran**, making it a broader Global South platform.
- 2. Goal of reducing technological dependence:** Expansion aims to **build shared capacities and reduce dependence on external technologies**, especially for developing economies.
- 3. Shift from networking to impact-driven projects:** New action plans focus on **biotechnology, climate tech, industrial innovation, and AI**, aiming for larger and scalable outcomes.
- 4. India's 2026 Presidency priorities:** The theme "**Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability**" focuses on **digital divide, public health, and climate resilience**.
- 5. Uneven participation of new members:** Participation is limited, as **only Egypt and Iran joined recent project calls**, showing integration challenges within BRICS+.
- 6. New institutional initiatives:** The **China-BRICS Research Centre** supports academic exchange and technological research, strengthening collaboration platforms.

### Key Challenges and Structural Limitations

- 1. Low research investment across members:** Except China, BRICS countries have **low GERD**, creating a wide gap with advanced systems like South Korea.
- 2. Weak National Innovation Systems:** Many members have **weaker innovation indicators**, requiring improvement and long-term strengthening.
- 3. Heterogeneity of members:** Differences in **economic development and scientific capacity** create coordination problems and conflicting interests.
- 4. Limited funding and programme scale:** Funding is **modest and competitive**, which restricts the scale and effectiveness of collaborative projects.
- 5. Lack of research and data framework:** There is **no regular mechanism to study STI cooperation**, limiting data-based policy decisions.
- 6. Rotational and weak institutional structure:** The system depends on **annual rotating leadership**, which is not suitable for long-term planning and continuity.

### Way forward

- 1. Establishing a permanent central mechanism:** A **BRICS Secretariat**, similar to the EU model, can manage funds, monitor progress, and ensure long-term coordination.
- 2. Launching mega-science projects:** Long-term **large-scale projects** can strengthen collaboration and build deeper scientific capacity among members.
- 3. Strengthening innovation systems of members:** Focus should be on improving **research capacity and innovation indicators**, especially in weaker countries.

4. **Expanding focus to STI governance:** Cooperation should include **governance of emerging technologies**, ensuring better global negotiation capacity.

5. **Encouraging targeted partnerships:** Developing “**paired links**” between members can reduce coordination issues and improve outcomes.

### Conclusion

STI cooperation in BRICS has grown since 2015, shifting towards innovation and development-focused collaboration. However, low funding, weak institutions, and uneven participation limit its impact. Strengthening governance, creating permanent structures, and scaling projects are necessary. India's 2026 leadership offers a key opportunity to improve effectiveness and global credibility of BRICS scientific cooperation.

### Question for practice:

Evaluate the evolution, scope, and challenges of scientific collaborations within BRICS, and examine the need for strengthening its institutional and innovation framework.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Futility of cabotage law

Source: The post “**Futility of cabotage law**” has been created, based on “**Futility of cabotage law**” published in “BusinessLine” on 19th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Governance

**Context:** Cabotage refers to the restriction of domestic coastal shipping to vessels registered in a particular country. In India, it is governed by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways with the objective of promoting domestic shipping. However, the recent rollback in 2026 of cabotage relaxation for foreign vessels has revived the debate regarding its effectiveness.

### Rationale behind Cabotage Law

1. Cabotage laws are intended to protect the domestic shipping industry from foreign competition.
2. They aim to ensure strategic and economic security by maintaining national control over coastal trade.
3. They also seek to promote the development of indigenous fleet capacity in the long run.

### Issues with Cabotage in India

#### 1. Limited Impact of Relaxation

- a. The relaxation provided between 2018 and 2026 was limited only to trans shipment container trade.
- b. As a result, it benefitted less than 8 per cent of India's total port traffic, thereby limiting its overall impact.

#### 2. Inadequate Domestic Capacity

- a. India currently has only around 30 feeder container ships with a carrying capacity of about 56,000 TEUs.
- b. This capacity is insufficient to efficiently service a long coastline of 7,500 km along with numerous major and non-major ports.

### 3. Higher Freight Costs

- a. Limited competition due to protectionist policies often leads to cartelisation tendencies among domestic players.
- b. Consequently, domestic shipping companies tend to keep freight rates higher than competitive global standards.

### 4. Risk of Cargo Diversion

- a. The rollback of relaxation may lead to diversion of cargo to foreign transshipment hubs.
- b. Major hubs likely to benefit include the Port of Colombo, Port Klang, and the Port of Singapore.

### 5. Weak Global Competitiveness

- a. The global shipping market is dominated by large companies such as Maersk and MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company).
- b. These companies collectively control around 78 per cent of the global container shipping market, creating high entry barriers for Indian firms.

### International Practices

1. Countries such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand have adopted relatively liberal regimes in coastal shipping.
2. Australia follows a conditional licensing system that allows foreign vessels under certain conditions.
3. Malaysia and Indonesia have introduced sector-specific relaxations in their cabotage laws.
4. These examples indicate a broader global trend towards controlled liberalisation rather than strict protectionism.

### Way Forward

1. India should adopt gradual liberalisation of cabotage laws to enhance competition.
2. Greater competition would help in reducing logistics and freight costs.
3. The domestic fleet should be strengthened through targeted incentives rather than excessive protection.
4. India should also focus on developing its own trans shipment hubs to reduce dependence on foreign ports.

**Conclusion:** While cabotage laws are intended to protect domestic shipping, excessive protection often results in inefficiency and higher costs. Therefore, a balanced approach that combines strategic protection with competitive liberalisation is essential for India to realise its maritime potential.

**Question:** Critically examine the relevance of cabotage laws in India. Do such protectionist measures help or hinder the growth of the shipping sector?

**Source:** [BusinessLine](#)

## Infrastructure Financing in India: Trends, Institutions, and Innovations

**Source:** The post “Infrastructure Financing in India: Trends, Institutions, and Innovations” has been created, based on “Infrastructure Financing in India: Trends, Institutions, and Innovations” published in “PIB” on 19th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** Infrastructure financing is critical for economic growth as it ensures a steady flow of long-term funds for large projects. In recent years, India has shifted from a budget-dependent model to a blended financing framework combining public investment, institutional support, and market-based instruments.

### Key Trends in Infrastructure Financing

1. Public capital expenditure has increased significantly from ₹2 lakh crore in FY2014–15 to ₹12.2 lakh crore in FY2026–27, reflecting the government’s infrastructure push.
2. Higher capex has helped crowd in private investment, generate employment, and boost demand in core sectors like steel and cement.
3. The focus has expanded to Tier-II and Tier-III cities through initiatives like City Economic Regions (CERs) for balanced regional development.

### Institutional Mechanisms

1. The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) mobilises global and domestic capital and invests in core sectors like transport and energy.
2. The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) provides long-term development finance, supports PPP projects, and promotes bond market development.
3. The Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) acts as the dedicated financing arm for Indian Railways through a leasing model.

### Financial Innovations and Instruments

1. Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) have enabled asset monetisation, unlocking over ₹1.5 lakh crore and recycling capital into new projects.
2. Debt market reforms, including ESG bonds and improved Electronic Book Provider (EBP) mechanisms, have strengthened long-term financing.
3. The Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund introduced in the Union Budget 2026–27 reduces risk for lenders and attracts private investment.
4. Asset monetisation models such as Toll-Operate-Transfer (ToT) have enhanced efficiency and funding availability.

### Key Issues in Infrastructure Financing in India

1. **Fiscal Constraints:** The government finances nearly half of infrastructure investment, but faces competing demands like health, education, and employment.
2. **Asset-Liability Mismatch:** Commercial banks struggle to provide long-term infrastructure loans due to short-term deposit structures.
3. **Weak PPP Participation:** Private investment remains subdued due to legacy issues, stressed balance sheets, and low investor confidence.

4. **Regulatory Constraints on Institutional Investors:** Insurance and pension funds are mandated to invest heavily in government securities, limiting infrastructure funding.
5. **Underdeveloped Corporate Bond Market:** The bond market is not deep enough to meet long-term financing needs of infrastructure projects.
6. **Low User Charges:** Many sectors like water supply and sanitation are not commercially viable, restricting cost recovery.
7. **Legal and Procedural Delays:** Land acquisition and environmental clearances create uncertainty, reducing investor interest.

### Way Forward

1. Greater reliance on PPP models and asset monetisation should be encouraged to reduce fiscal pressure.
2. Long-term financing institutions such as National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development should be strengthened.
3. Regulatory reforms should enable insurance and pension funds to invest more in infrastructure.
4. The corporate bond market should be deepened through credit enhancement and investor diversification.
5. User charges should be rationalised along with targeted subsidies to ensure viability.
6. Single-window clearance systems and streamlined regulations should be implemented to reduce delays.

**Conclusion:** India's infrastructure financing ecosystem is evolving through higher public investment, strong institutions, and innovative financial instruments. Addressing structural challenges through reforms and enhanced private participation will be essential to sustain inclusive and resilient growth in line with the vision of Viksit Bharat.

**Question:** Discuss the recent trends, institutional mechanisms, and innovations in infrastructure financing in India. How do they contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth? Also examine the challenges and suggest measures to address them.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

## India's Future Demographic Challenges

**UPSC Syllabus:** Gs Paper 1- Society- population and associated issues

### Introduction

India is entering a new demographic phase marked by **slower population growth and rising ageing trends**. The population is projected to increase from **1,355.8 million (2021) to 1,590.1 million (2051)** with a **low annual growth of 0.5%**. This shift reduces fears of population explosion and signals a transition towards a **more urban, balanced, and ageing population**, creating new economic and social challenges.

### Structural Changes in Population

1. **Declining population growth:** Population growth is slowing significantly, moving below earlier estimates and indicating the end of rapid expansion.

**2. Falling child population:** The 0–4 age group is projected to fall sharply from **113.5 million (2021) to 8.6 million by mid-century**, showing sustained fertility decline.

**3. Peak and decline of workforce:** The working-age population will rise to **1,009 million (65.5%) by 2041**, then decline to **998.1 million (62.8%) by 2051**, signalling a limited demographic dividend window.

**4. Rapid ageing trend:** Elderly population will increase from **130.5 million (9.62%) in 2021 to 325.3 million (20.5%) by 2051**, reflecting a major demographic shift.

**5. Rising median age:** Median age will increase from **28 to 40 years**, showing movement towards an advanced demographic stage.

## Sectoral Consequences of These Changes

### 1. Educational Impact

a) **Falling enrolments and uneconomic schools:** Declining child population is reducing demand for schools, leading to **uneconomic schools** and risk of teacher job losses.

b) **Decline of government schools:** Government schools reduced from **11.07 lakh to 10.18 lakh**, showing a drop of nearly **90,000 schools**.

c) **Rise of private schooling:** Private schools increased from **2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh**, driven by affordability and perceived better quality.

### 2. Economic and Fiscal Impact

a) **Workforce and economic risks:** The demographic dividend will weaken after **2041**, affecting long-term economic growth.

b) **Fiscal pressure on the state:** Rising elderly population will increase spending on **healthcare, pensions, and social security**, putting pressure on public finances.

### 3. Healthcare Impact

a) **Changing healthcare demand:** Lower fertility reduces maternity needs, but ageing population increases demand for **geriatric care and long-term healthcare services**.

### 4. Employment and Regional Imbalance

a) **Uneven regional transition:** Southern States are ageing faster, while northern States still have rising working-age populations, creating imbalance in growth.

b) **Employment and skill concerns:** Youthful States face issues of **employability and stagnant education spending**, despite having a large workforce.

### 5. Social Impact

a) **Gender dimension of ageing:** Elderly women face higher vulnerability due to **longer life expectancy and lower financial security**.

b) **Weakening family support systems:** Migration and nuclear families are reducing traditional support for the elderly.

### What Should Be Done?

1. **Reform education and skill systems:** Education must focus on skills to prepare youth before the demographic dividend declines.

2. **Increase female workforce participation:** Expanding women's participation can offset workforce decline and create a **gender dividend**.

3. **Strengthen healthcare systems:** There is a need to expand **geriatric care and healthcare infrastructure** for ageing population.

4. **Continue family planning efforts:** Investments are needed to ensure reproductive rights and prevent unintended pregnancies.

5. **Develop employment and industrial policy:** Job creation in new sectors like **green energy and care economy** is essential.

6. **Expand social security systems:** Public pensions and elderly support systems must be strengthened to reduce dependency risks.

7. **Leverage silver economy:** Growing elderly population can create new economic opportunities and support a second demographic dividend.

### Conclusion

India is shifting from a **youth-driven population to an ageing society**, with a narrowing demographic dividend window. The challenge lies in **using the workforce advantage before 2041 while preparing for rising elderly needs**. Without strong reforms in employment, healthcare, and social security, demographic transition may become a burden rather than an opportunity for growth.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the key structural changes in India's population and analyse their sectoral consequences, along with the policy measures needed to address emerging demographic challenges.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## The opportunity in Cameroon to rebalance the WTO

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

### Introduction

Trade is no longer driven only by economics. It is increasingly shaped by geopolitics, where tariffs are used as pressure tools and economic dependence is used strategically. **The Munich Security Report 2026, which highlights global security trends and served as the basis for the Munich Security Conference (MSC),** shows a shift toward disruption and short-term, power-driven actions. In this context, the **WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14)**, which is the highest decision-making body of the WTO, will be held in Cameroon from March 26–29, 2026. It is important because it provides an opportunity to assess whether the WTO can adapt to the changing global trade order.

### What is the present context of global trade and WTO?

1. **Shift toward geopolitical use of trade:** Trade is now used for strategic pressure through tariffs and dependence. This reflects a move away from purely economic objectives.
2. **Rise of “wrecking-ball politics”:** The **Munich Security Report 2026** highlights a shift toward disruption and short-term deals. This weakens rule-based global systems.
3. **Declining adherence to WTO norms:** Countries are increasingly using unilateral tariffs and bypassing multilateral commitments. This reduces the relevance of WTO rules.

### What are the Key Challenges Facing the WTO?

1. **Dispute settlement paralysis:** The Appellate Body remains stalled, weakening enforcement. **Rules lose value without enforceability**, reducing trust.
2. **Slow decision-making structure:** With **166 members**, consensus is difficult and slow. This leads to weak outcomes and unresolved issues.
3. **Outdated rules for modern trade:** Digital commerce has expanded rapidly. WTO rules have not kept pace with these changes.
4. **Market distortions due to geopolitics:** Tariffs and coercive practices are distorting trade. This weakens fair competition.

### What are its Implications?

1. **Unstable and unpredictable trade system:** Weak enforcement and rising unilateral tariffs can make global trade uncertain and fragmented.
2. **Vulnerability of smaller and poorer countries:** These countries depend on common rules for protection. Weakening rules exposes them to pressure from stronger economies.
3. **Shift toward power-driven trade order:** Trade may move toward arrangements shaped by power and coercion rather than shared rules.
4. **Distortion of global markets:** Use of tariffs as political tools and economic coercion disrupts fair competition.
5. **Weakening of multilateral institutions:** Bypassing WTO commitments reduces the credibility and authority of the WTO.

**6. Decline of rules-based global order:** “Wrecking-ball politics” reflects a move toward disruption and short-term deals, weakening institutional stability.

#### What Should Be Done?

**1. Restore dispute settlement credibility:** A **binding and trusted system** must be rebuilt. This will ensure enforcement and reduce political interference.

**2. Ensure fairness along with predictability:** Issues like **agricultural subsidies, market distortions, and unequal market access need transparent solutions**. This will make WTO rules both legally sound and developmentally fair.

**3. Reform Special and Differential Treatment (SDT):** SDT provisions should be updated to reflect current economic realities. This will ensure meaningful support to developing countries.

**4. Improve transparency on subsidies:** Members should clearly report subsidies and follow stricter rules. This will help identify and control distortive trade practices.

**5. Adopt cooperative and rules-based reform approach:** Instead of relying on unilateral tariffs and short-term deals, countries should work through WTO mechanisms. This will strengthen trust in multilateral rules.

**6. Strengthen collective commitment to multilateralism:** Countries supporting a rules-based system should cooperate more closely and invest in WTO frameworks. This will prevent dominance by powerful economies.

#### Conclusion

The MC14 presents a critical opportunity to rebalance the WTO. Reform must restore enforcement, update rules, and ensure fairness. Without action, trade may shift toward power-based dominance and weaken protection for smaller countries. Strengthening a rules-based system is essential to ensure stability and prevent economic coercion in global trade.

#### Question for practice:

Examine how the changing geopolitical use of trade is creating challenges for the WTO and why the MC14 in Cameroon is seen as an opportunity to rebalance and reform the global trading system.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

#### **New GDP series, charting the path ahead**

Source: The post “**New GDP series, charting the path ahead**” has been created, based on “**New GDP series, charting the path ahead**” published in “The Hindu” on 20th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** India has introduced a new GDP series with base year 2022–23, replacing the earlier 2011–12 series. This revision aims to provide a more accurate and updated estimate of the Indian economy.

#### Significance of the New GDP Series

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1. The new GDP series reflects the current structure of the economy by incorporating recent changes in production and consumption patterns.
2. It improves the accuracy and reliability of economic estimates compared to the outdated base year.
3. It enables better policy formulation by providing realistic macroeconomic indicators.
4. It aligns India's national accounts methodology with international standards.

### Key Features and Findings

1. The GDP at current prices is estimated at ₹261.18 lakh crore for 2022–23, ₹289.84 lakh crore for 2023–24, and ₹318.07 lakh crore for 2024–25.
2. The new estimates are lower by about 3–4% compared to the previous series.
3. The share of the primary sector is 21.4%, the secondary sector is 25.8%, and the tertiary sector is 52.9% in 2024–25.
4. The manufacturing sector has shown strong growth, with 12.7% growth in 2023–24 and 9.3% in 2024–25.
5. Private Final Consumption Expenditure accounts for around 56% of GDP.

### Major Methodological Improvements

1. The new series allocates Gross Value Added of multi-activity companies across different activities based on revenue shares instead of assigning it to a single main activity.
2. It uses blow-up factors based on paid-up capital to account for active companies that do not file returns.
3. It includes Limited Liability Partnerships in the estimation using data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
4. It estimates the household sector GVA using GVA per worker from ASUSE and worker data from PLFS, which improves accuracy.
5. It incorporates high-frequency survey data such as ASUSE, PLFS, and HCES for better estimation.
6. It uses improved techniques like double deflation and volume extrapolation for estimating real GVA.
7. It derives private consumption expenditure more directly using data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022–23.

### Challenges Ahead

1. The allocation of national-level GVA of companies across States remains difficult due to the lack of state-wise corporate data.
2. The Annual Survey of Industries has a limited sampling frame, which leads to under-representation of manufacturing units.
3. This limitation can distort Gross State Domestic Product estimates.
4. The household sector estimates show volatility due to fluctuations in GVA per worker data from ASUSE.
5. The dependence on multiple surveys may lead to inconsistencies in estimation.

### Suggested Reforms

1. The sampling frame of the Annual Survey of Industries should be updated using MCA and GST databases.
2. A dedicated survey of active companies should be conducted to improve state-level GVA estimation.
3. A rotating panel design should be introduced in ASUSE to reduce volatility in estimates.

4. Moving averages should be used to smooth fluctuations in annual data.

**Conclusion:** The new GDP series represents a major improvement in India's national accounting system. However, further refinements in data collection and methodology are necessary to ensure more accurate GDP and GSDP estimates.

**Question:** Discuss the significance of the new GDP series (base year 2022–23) in India. What methodological improvements have been introduced, and what challenges remain in ensuring accurate GDP and GSDP estimation?

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### India's crude oil and gas reserves and why we are lagging on this count

**Source:** The post "India's crude oil and gas reserves and why we are lagging on this count" has been created, based on "All you want to know about India's crude oil and gas reserves and why we are lagging on this count" published in "BusinessLine" on 20th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** Energy security is a critical component of economic stability, especially for an import-dependent country like India. In the context of rising geopolitical tensions, particularly in West Asia, maintaining adequate reserves of crude oil and gas has become increasingly important.

#### Importance of Strategic and Commercial Reserves

1. Fossil fuel storage capacity acts as a buffer against supply disruptions caused by geopolitical conflicts, natural disasters, and technical failures.
2. Strategic reserves help ensure continuity of economic activities during crises.
3. These reserves also reduce vulnerability to global price volatility and external pressure.
4. They act as a deterrent against the use of energy supplies as a geopolitical tool.

#### Status of Crude Oil Reserves in India

1. India maintains a combined crude oil and petroleum product buffer of approximately 74 to 90 days of consumption.
2. Strategic reserves managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited have a total capacity of 5.33 MMT.
3. These reserves provide around 9.5 days of crude oil coverage and are about 80% filled.
4. The reserves are located at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur.
5. Oil Marketing Companies maintain commercial stocks equivalent to about 64.5 days of consumption.
6. The government has approved an additional 6.5 MMT capacity under a Public-Private Partnership model.
7. India plans to expand total strategic storage capacity to 15 MMT in the coming decade.

#### Status of LPG Storage in India

1. India's LPG storage capacity is critically low, covering less than two days of national consumption.
2. The country relies mainly on operational storage rather than strategic reserves.

3. Major storage facilities include Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru with a combined capacity of about 1.4 lakh tonnes.
4. The infrastructure is designed for rapid distribution rather than long-term storage.

### Status of Natural Gas Storage

1. India currently does not have a dedicated strategic natural gas reserve system.
2. The government is planning to establish strategic gas reserves in response to recent supply shocks.
3. A proposal to mandate additional storage capacity at LNG terminals is under consideration.
4. Feasibility studies are being conducted for new storage sites, including salt caverns.

### Reasons for India Lagging in Strategic Storage

1. India's energy infrastructure has historically prioritised efficient distribution over long-term storage.
2. Earlier availability of cheap and abundant global LPG reduced the urgency for building reserves.
3. Geological constraints limit the availability of suitable locations such as salt caverns.
4. High capital costs make large-scale storage projects economically challenging.
5. Land acquisition issues, local resistance, and administrative delays slow down project implementation.
6. Policy focus has been reactive rather than proactive in building strategic reserves.

### Global Comparison

1. Countries like Japan maintain large strategic reserves sufficient for about 146 days of imports.
2. China has developed massive storage capacity and is continuously expanding it.
3. South Korea has an advanced and integrated oil and gas storage system.
4. Singapore maintains large reserves due to its role as a global energy trading hub.

### Way Forward

1. India should expand its strategic petroleum reserves to meet international benchmarks of at least 90 days of imports.
2. There is a need to develop dedicated strategic reserves for LPG and natural gas.
3. Public-Private Partnerships should be encouraged to finance storage infrastructure.
4. Faster land acquisition and streamlined clearances are required to avoid delays.
5. Advanced technologies and alternative storage solutions should be explored.

**Conclusion:** While India has made progress in crude oil storage, significant gaps remain in LPG and natural gas reserves. Strengthening strategic storage capacity is essential for enhancing long-term energy security and economic resilience.

**Question:** Discuss the status of India's crude oil and gas reserves. Why is India lagging in building strategic energy storage compared to other major economies?

**Source:** [BusinessLine](#)

## AI-powered tax governance in India and its challenges

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

## Introduction

India faces a **low tax-GDP ratio (16.36%)** and **high tax evasion (around 4.3% annual revenue loss)**. At the same time, AI is gaining importance in governance, as seen at the India AI Impact Summit (February 2026). In this situation, the use of AI in tax administration through Project Insight shows a shift towards **data-driven governance to improve compliance, fairness, and revenue mobilisation**.

## AI in Tax Governance in India

**1. Project Insight and core objective:** Project Insight, launched in 2017 and operational in 2019, aims to increase voluntary compliance, reduce tax evasion, and ensure fair and unbiased tax enforcement through AI and data analytics.

### 2. Three components of Project Insight:

- **INTRAC (analytical engine):** INTRAC uses AI to analyse data from **banking, property, securities, GST, credit cards, and high-value transactions** to build a **360-degree financial profile of taxpayers**.
- **Compliance Management Centralized Processing Centre:** It uses INTRAC data to **monitor taxpayer behaviour and guide compliance actions**.
- **NUDGE strategy for voluntary compliance:** It sends **SMS and email reminders** to help taxpayers correct or confirm their returns.

**3. Working mechanism of AI system:** AI identifies gaps between declared income and actual financial activities, enabling detection of potential tax evasion.

### Benefits of AI in tax governance:

**1. Risk-based prioritisation:** AI helps authorities **focus on high-risk and complex evasion cases**, improving enforcement efficiency.

**2. Automation of routine tasks:** AI reduces manual work, allowing officials to **focus on cases requiring human judgment**.

**3. Improved taxpayer services:** AI supports **correct return filing, chatbot assistance, and prevention of tax scams**, improving compliance experience.

## Effectiveness and Global Validation of AI in tax governance

**1. Rise in voluntary compliance:** Since 2020-21, over one crore revised returns have been filed, generating ₹11,000 crore additional tax revenue.

**2. Improved foreign asset disclosure:** In targeted campaigns, 62% taxpayers corrected returns, and 30,161 filers disclosed ₹29,208 crore assets and ₹1,089 crore income.

- 3. Correction of false deductions:** NUDGE campaigns led to correction of ₹963 crore false claims and payment of ₹410 crore additional taxes.
- 4. Faster refund processing:** Refund time reduced from 93 days to 17 days, improving efficiency and taxpayer experience.
- 5. Detection of large-scale evasion:** AI tools uncovered ₹70,000 crore suppressed turnover in restaurants using advanced manipulation methods.
- 6. Global acceptance of AI systems:** Countries like Australia, Italy, the UK, and the US have adopted similar AI-based systems and generated additional revenue.

### Challenges and Risks in AI-Based Tax Governance

- 1. Data quality and false positives:** AI depends on data quality and may wrongly flag legitimate financial behaviour as evasion, especially in complex income cases.
- 2. Algorithmic bias in decision-making:** AI models may reflect existing socio-economic or geographic biases, leading to unequal targeting of taxpayers.
- 3. Lack of transparency and explainability:** Taxpayers may not know why they are flagged or how decisions are made, weakening trust in the system.
- 4. Limited human oversight:** Absence of easy human review forces taxpayers to justify flagged transactions, increasing compliance burden.
- 5. Privacy and data security risks:** Use of sensitive financial data creates risk of misuse and cyber threats.
- 6. Institutional gaps in AI governance:** Lack of AI ombudsperson, audit systems, and public reporting of errors reduces accountability.

### What should be done?

- 1. Improve data quality systems:** Strong data systems are needed to reduce false positives and incorrect targeting.
- 2. Ensure human-in-the-loop oversight:** Human review must be included in key decisions to protect fairness and due process.
- 3. Enhance transparency and accountability:** Taxpayers should know how AI decisions are made and how to challenge them.
- 4. Strengthen data protection frameworks:** Robust safeguards are required to protect sensitive financial and personal data.
- 5. Establish institutional safeguards:** Create systems for independent audits, ombudsperson, and reporting of error and appeal rates.

**6. Maintain trust in tax system:** Strong governance is needed to prevent AI systems from becoming opaque and surveillance-driven.

### Conclusion

AI can strengthen tax compliance, improve efficiency, and increase revenue. However, weak safeguards can reduce fairness and trust. India must ensure **transparency, accountability, human oversight, and data protection** in AI systems. A balanced approach will help build a tax system that is both effective and trusted, ensuring sustainable compliance and fair governance.

### Question for practice:

Examine how Artificial Intelligence is transforming tax governance in India, highlighting its effectiveness, key challenges, and the need for safeguards.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## India's Power Sector: Progress and Reforms

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

### Introduction

Electricity is essential for economic activity, daily life, and digital systems. India has moved from power shortages to a system with improved capacity, reliability, and access. This shift is due to sustained investments, better policies, and institutional reforms. The sector now reflects adequacy in supply, expansion in infrastructure, and stronger governance. It also supports economic growth while preparing for future energy needs and sustainability.

### Growth and Infrastructure Expansion in India's Power Sector

- 1. Rising Electricity Demand and Capacity Expansion:** Electricity demand has increased across households, industry, and agriculture. In FY 2025–26, a record **52,537 MW capacity** was added, including **39,657 MW renewable energy**, marking the highest-ever annual addition.
- 2. Growth in Installed Capacity:** India's total installed capacity reached **520.51 GW by January 2026**, showing over **11% growth**. This ensures the system can meet rising consumption needs.
- 3. Strengthening Transmission Infrastructure:** New substations, upgraded transformers, and high-capacity transmission corridors improved power flow. These steps reduced bottlenecks and improved grid stability.
- 4. Expansion of National Grid:** The transmission network crossed **5 lakh circuit km**, with **1,407 GVA transformation capacity**. This strengthens integration of diverse energy sources across regions.

### From Deficit to Reliable Power Supply

- 1. Reduction in Power Shortages:** Peak demand of **242.49 GW** was successfully met in FY 2025–26. Power shortages declined sharply from **4.2% in FY14 to 0.03% in 2025**, showing strong supply adequacy.

**2. Improved Rural and Urban Supply:** Rural supply increased from **12.5 hours to 22.6 hours daily**, while urban supply rose to **23.4 hours**. This improved reliability across regions.

**3. Increase in Electricity Consumption:** Per capita consumption rose to **1,460 kWh in 2024–25**, up by **52.6%** from 2013–14. This reflects better access and economic activity.

**4. Reduced Dependence on Traditional Fuels:** Reliable electricity reduced reliance on diesel and traditional fuels. This lowered costs and improved environmental outcomes.

### Universal Access and Distribution Strengthening

**1. Last-Mile Connectivity Expansion:** Schemes like **DDUGJY, IPDS, and Saubhagya** strengthened rural and urban distribution networks. These improved infrastructure and ensured electricity access.

**2. Mass Electrification Achievements:** About **18,374 villages** were electrified and **2.86 crore households** received connections. Total investment was around **₹1.85 lakh crore**.

**3. Modernisation of Distribution Systems:** Urban systems adopted IT tools like smart metering, ERP, and real-time monitoring. These improved efficiency and service delivery.

**4. Importance of Distribution Companies (DISCOMs):** DISCOMs connect consumers with the power system. Their performance affects service quality and financial stability of the entire sector.

### Distribution Sector Reforms and Financial Turnaround in India

**1. Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS):** Launched with an outlay of **₹3.03 lakh crore**, with **₹2.8 lakh crore approved**. It aims to improve efficiency and financial sustainability.

**2. Smart Metering and Consumer Empowerment:** Around **5.62 crore smart meters** have been installed. These provide real-time usage data and help consumers manage consumption.

**3. Reduction in Financial Stress:** Outstanding dues reduced from **₹1.4 lakh crore to ₹4,109 crore** due to LPS Rules. This improved liquidity across the sector.

**4. Improvement in DISCOM Finances:** DISCOMs reported **₹2,701 crore profit in FY25**, reversing large losses in FY14. This marks a major financial turnaround.

**5. Decline in AT&C Losses:** Losses reduced from **22.62% to 15.04%**, showing better efficiency. Billing and collection systems improved significantly.

**6. Narrowing ACS-ARR Gap:** The gap reduced from **₹0.78/unit to ₹0.06/unit**, showing better cost recovery. This supports long-term financial sustainability.

### Policy Reforms and Clean Energy Transition in India's Power Sector

**1. National Electricity Plan (2023–2032):** Targets **458 GW peak demand by 2032** with **₹9.15 lakh crore investment**. Transmission network will expand to **6.48 lakh ckm** and **2,345 GVA capacity**.

- 2. Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2026:** Focuses on cost-reflective tariffs and reduced cross-subsidies. It allows industries to procure power directly and improves competitiveness.
- 3. Automatic Cost Adjustment Mechanisms:** Monthly adjustments align costs with tariffs. This prevents financial losses for distribution utilities.
- 4. Green Energy Open Access Rules:** Consumers above **100 kW load** can access renewable energy with simplified approvals. This promotes clean energy use.
- 5. Growth in Renewable Energy Capacity:** India ranks **4th globally** in renewable capacity. Solar grew from **3 GW (2014) to 140 GW (2026)**, while wind reached **54.65 GW**.
- 6. Record Renewable Energy Contribution:** On **29 July 2025**, renewables met **51.5% of electricity demand (203 GW)**. Solar, wind, and hydro played major roles.
- 7. Promotion of Rooftop Solar:** Under PM Surya Ghar scheme, **31.04 lakh households** installed rooftop solar. The target is **1 crore households by 2026-27**.
- 8. Strengthening Transmission for Renewables:** Investment limits of POWERGRID increased to support large projects. This helps in efficient evacuation of renewable energy.

### Institutional Strengthening and Global Engagement

- 1. Role of Bharat Electricity Summit 2026:** The summit provides a global platform for collaboration and innovation. It focuses on sustainability and energy transition.
- 2. Large-Scale Participation and Investment:** Over **25,000 attendees, 500 exhibitors**, and **₹50 lakh crore investment opportunities** are expected. This reflects global interest in India's power sector.
- 3. Platform for Technology and Partnerships:** The summit includes discussions, exhibitions, and knowledge exchange. It supports innovation and global cooperation.

### Conclusion

India's power sector has moved from shortage to stability through sustained reforms, infrastructure expansion, and policy support. Reliable access, financial improvement, and renewable growth show structural progress. Continued focus on distribution efficiency, clean energy integration, and future demand planning is needed. The sector now plays a key role in supporting growth, inclusion, and long-term sustainability.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how infrastructure expansion, distribution reforms, and policy measures have contributed to improving reliability, access, and sustainability in India's power sector.

Source: [PIB](#)

## For public-health reform, fix urban governance

**Source:** The post “For public-health reform, fix urban governance” has been created, based on “For public-health reform, fix urban governance” published in “Indian Express” on 23rd March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** Urban public health crises in India are often discussed mainly in terms of shortages of hospitals and workforce. However, deeper structural weaknesses exist in everyday urban governance systems such as sanitation, drainage, water supply, and waste management. Recent initiatives such as the Urban Challenge Fund (UCF) and Finance Commission grants to Urban Local Bodies reflect increasing recognition of cities as important governance units for improving public health outcomes.

### Urbanisation Pattern and Governance Challenges in India

1. India’s urbanisation is driven less by migration to megacities like Mumbai and Delhi and more by expansion into surrounding suburbs such as Gurugram, Noida, and Navi Mumbai.
2. Rapid conversion of villages into real estate and industrial hubs has taken place without adequate provision of transport services, drinking water supply, drainage infrastructure, and safe disposal systems for solid and liquid waste.
3. Spatial expansion of cities has occurred faster than the institutional readiness of urban governance systems.
4. Urban Local Bodies control barely 1 per cent of India’s GDP compared to 5 to 8 per cent in BRICS and OECD countries.
5. Master plans in many cities function more as symbolic planning tools rather than enforceable development frameworks.
6. Slums and low-income settlements often become sites of concentrated disadvantage, while redevelopment projects frequently prioritise engineering solutions over dignity and social integration.

### Triple Crisis Facing Indian Cities

1. Weak urban governance has placed Indian cities at the intersection of deteriorating public health conditions, increasing climate vulnerability, and rising migration pressures.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of the urban social contract, especially in informal settlements where municipal capacity was limited.

### Role of the Urban Challenge Fund (UCF)

1. The Union Cabinet approved the Urban Challenge Fund with a total value of ₹4 lakh crore to support urban development initiatives.
2. The Central Government will provide assistance of ₹1 lakh crore, while at least 50 per cent of the remaining funds will be raised through market financing.
3. Projects under the fund will be selected through a challenge-based framework across sectors such as economic corridors, urban mobility, climate resilience, disaster management, and water and sanitation.
4. However, the emphasis on competitive selection, market finance, and private participation raises concerns regarding equity among cities with different financial capacities.

### Role of Finance Commission Grants to Urban Local Bodies

1. The Finance Commission allocated ₹3.6 trillion to Urban Local Bodies over a period of five years.
2. This allocation reflects recognition of cities as important governance units rather than merely implementation agencies.
3. The Commission recommended a 455 per cent increase in financial allocation to this sector.
4. A substantial portion of these grants has been linked to sanitation services, waste management systems, and water supply infrastructure.
5. The Commission also provided untied grants that allow Urban Local Bodies to identify and respond to local priorities such as flood-proofing low-income settlements, improving informal waste management systems, and strengthening last-mile water access.

### Link Between Urban Governance and Public Health Outcomes

1. Urban public health crises are not limited to shortages of hospitals and workforce but are strongly influenced by failures in basic municipal services.
2. Weak sanitation systems, inefficient waste management, inadequate drainage networks, unsafe water supply, and poor air quality significantly affect public health outcomes.
3. Strengthening water supply and sanitation infrastructure can act as a frontline defence against the spread of infectious diseases, including drug-resistant infections.
4. The Finance Commission recognised this relationship by linking grants directly to improvements in municipal services.

### Climate Risks and Urban Governance Limitations

1. Cities face increasing risks from heat waves, urban flooding, water stress, and air pollution.
2. Despite these risks, climate adaptation continues to remain largely a national and state-level policy responsibility.
3. Urban Local Bodies often lack sufficient fiscal autonomy to design and implement local climate adaptation strategies.
4. Predictable and flexible fiscal transfers can help strengthen the capacity of cities to address climate-related risks effectively.

### Institutional Constraints in Urban Governance

1. Financial support alone cannot compensate for weaknesses in institutional design within Urban Local Bodies.
2. Most Urban Local Bodies continue to face administrative constraints due to limited autonomy over staff recruitment, planning authority, and revenue generation instruments.
3. Fragmentation across multiple urban agencies creates coordination challenges and reduces governance efficiency.
4. Fiscal devolution must therefore be accompanied by functional and political devolution to strengthen urban governance systems.

### Way Forward

1. Urban governance reforms should focus on strengthening functional and political devolution alongside fiscal transfers to Urban Local Bodies.
2. Urban Local Bodies should be provided greater autonomy over staffing, planning powers, and revenue instruments to improve institutional capacity.

3. Coordination mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure synergy across fragmented urban agencies involved in service delivery.
4. Market-based financing under initiatives such as the Urban Challenge Fund should be implemented carefully to avoid widening inequalities between financially strong and weak cities.
5. Greater emphasis should be placed on improving sanitation systems, waste management infrastructure, drainage networks, water supply services, and air quality management as core components of public health reform.
6. Cities should be given predictable and flexible fiscal transfers to strengthen their role in climate adaptation and migration management.
7. Untied grants should continue to support locally relevant interventions such as flood-proofing vulnerable settlements, strengthening informal waste systems, and improving last-mile water access.

**Conclusion:** Improving urban public health outcomes in India requires strengthening municipal governance systems rather than focusing only on healthcare infrastructure expansion. Initiatives such as the Urban Challenge Fund and Finance Commission grants represent important progress, but lasting improvements depend on stronger institutional capacity, greater fiscal autonomy, and better coordination among Urban Local Bodies.

**Question:** Urban public health challenges in India are closely linked to weaknesses in urban governance rather than only shortages in healthcare infrastructure. Examine the context of recent initiatives such as the Urban Challenge Fund and Finance Commission grants to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

### Youth suicides in India

**Source:** The post “**Youth suicides in India**” has been created, based on “**Youth suicides in India: When oppression forces people to choose death**” published in “Indian Express” on 23rd March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-1- Society

**Context:** Youth suicide is a leading cause of mortality among young people in India and reflects deeper structural and social challenges beyond individual psychological distress. Suicides driven by oppression from families or communities, especially in matters of marriage, identity, and social mobility, can be understood as a form of “**honour suicide**,” which is morally comparable to honour killings. Addressing youth suicides therefore requires broader social and policy reforms in addition to strengthening mental-health services.

#### Nature and Extent of Youth Suicide in India

- Data from the Million Death Study and the National Crime Records Bureau show that suicide is one of the leading causes of death among young people in India.
- Nearly two-thirds of suicide deaths among females occur before the age of 25 years.
- Youth represents a vulnerable life stage marked by transitions related to education, employment, relationships, and identity formation.
- Many young people, particularly women, end their lives when forced into marriages against their wishes, reflecting severe restrictions on personal autonomy.

#### Social Determinants of Youth Suicide

### 1. Role of Social and Economic Conditions

- a. Suicidal behaviour is shaped significantly by social and economic conditions such as poverty, exclusion, and violence rather than individual psychopathology alone.
- b. A major driver of youth suicide in India is the widening gap between the aspirations of young people and the opportunities permitted by society.

### 2. Development Paradox in Suicide Rates

- a. Suicide rates are highest in relatively developed states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- b. Suicide rates are comparatively lower in less developed states such as Bihar.
- c. This pattern reflects the tension between rising aspirations and rigid social constraints.

### 3. Role of Oppressive Social Norms

- a. Rapid social change in India has intensified the conflict between youth aspirations and traditional norms.
- b. Many young people face restrictions in choosing their partners due to laws and social pressures against inter-caste, interfaith, same-sex, and live-in relationships.
- c. Such restrictions reduce personal autonomy and increase psychological distress.
- d. Deaths by suicide in such circumstances can be described as honour suicides resulting from social oppression.

### 4. Sociological Understanding of Youth Suicide

- a. The sociologist Emile Durkheim described suicide as a social phenomenon shaped by levels of social integration and regulation.
- b. Two types of suicides described by Durkheim are particularly relevant in India today.
  - **Anomic Suicides:** Anomic suicides occur during periods of rapid social and economic change when traditional norms weaken and aspirations increase without adequate opportunities.
  - **Fatalistic Suicides:** Fatalistic suicides occur in situations of excessive social control where individuals feel trapped and unable to change their circumstances.

### Role of Structural Inequalities and Identity-Based Discrimination

1. Youth suicides also reflect deeper structural inequalities related to caste, class, gender, and religion.
2. Deaths by suicide among students in higher educational institutions, particularly among Dalit youth, highlight the political and social context of such tragedies.
3. Oppressive social norms and discrimination often push young people into situations where they feel they have no control over their lives.

### Limitations of a Mental Health-Only Approach

1. Investment in mental-health services alone cannot fully address youth suicides.
2. Evidence from China shows that a significant decline in suicide rates since the 1990s resulted mainly from structural changes such as economic development, urbanisation, and rural transformation rather than expansion of mental-health services alone.
3. Reducing exposure to social strain, especially for women, played a crucial role in lowering suicide rates.

### Constitutional and Social Concerns

1. Laws restricting interfaith marriages, inter-caste marriages, live-in relationships, and same-sex relationships limit personal freedom and social mobility among youth.
2. Such restrictions contradict the constitutional values of equality, liberty, and dignity.
3. Youth suicides caused by social oppression represent a serious challenge to the spirit of the Constitution.

### Way Forward

1. Policy responses should address the gap between youth aspirations and available opportunities in education, employment, and social mobility.
2. Greater social acceptance of inter-caste, interfaith, same-sex, and choice-based marriages should be encouraged to strengthen personal autonomy.
3. Legal and institutional frameworks should protect the rights of young people to choose their partners and life paths freely.
4. Mental-health services should be expanded alongside structural reforms addressing poverty, exclusion, and discrimination.
5. Educational institutions should strengthen mechanisms to prevent discrimination and support vulnerable students, especially those from marginalised communities.
6. Community-level engagement involving faith leaders, policymakers, youth organisations, and mental-health professionals should be promoted to challenge oppressive social norms.
7. Social transformation is necessary to ensure that caste, gender, religion, and class identities do not become drivers of exclusion and despair among young people.

**Conclusion:** Youth suicides in India reflect deeper structural and social inequalities rather than only individual psychological distress. Preventing such deaths requires building a society where young people's aspirations for education, employment, dignity, and freedom of choice are respected in line with constitutional values.

**Question:** Youth suicides in India are deeply linked to social oppression, rigid norms, and structural inequalities rather than only mental-health factors. Examine the causes and suggest measures to address this challenge.

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

### 'Double engine' — cute slogan, a serious federal question

**UPSC Syllabus:** Gs Paper 3- issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

### Introduction

The idea of a "double-engine sarkar" presents coordination between Union and State governments as a path to faster development. It appears simple and appealing. However, it raises a deeper constitutional concern. It suggests that development may depend on political alignment. This creates tension with federal balance, equal citizenship, and rule-based governance within the Union.

### Concept of Double-Engine Governance vs Cooperative Federalism

**1. Meaning of Double-Engine Governance:** It implies that when the same party governs at both levels, development becomes faster due to better coordination.

2. **Difference from Cooperative Federalism:** Cooperative federalism ensures coordination across governments irrespective of political ideology and electoral outcomes.

3. **Implicit Political Condition:** It suggests that development may depend on alignment, creating a perception that non-aligned States may face disadvantages.

### Challenges to Federalism

1. **Preferential Development Narrative:** Election messaging often suggests that aligned States will receive faster development and greater benefits.

2. **Violation of Constitutional Structure:** The Constitution defines Union and States as partners, not as entities dependent on political goodwill.

3. **Unequal Access to Public Resources:** Taxes are collected from citizens across all States, so distribution cannot depend on which party governs a State.

### 4. Fiscal Federal Concerns:

- Use of recent population data in allocation formulas may penalise States that controlled population growth.
- Increasing use of cesses and surcharges reduces the divisible pool shared with States.

5. **State-Level Grievances:** States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana have raised concerns about fairness and autonomy.

6. **Legislative Obstruction through Governors:** In some States, Governors have delayed assent to Bills passed by elected legislatures, affecting governance.

7. **Governance Conflict:** Disputes between the elected government, Lieutenant-Governor, and Union government created administrative delays.

### Constitutional and Institutional Safeguards for Federal Balance

1. **Seventh schedule:** It classifies legislative subjects into the **Union List, State List, and Concurrent List**, ensuring a balance of power and cooperation between different levels of government.

2. **Article 261 (Full Faith and Credit Clause):** Mandates that public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of one state be recognized and upheld across all states, promoting legal uniformity.

3. **All India Services (Article 312):** Provides for centrally-recruited officers serving in both the Centre and states, ensuring administrative cooperation.

4. **Goods and Services Tax (GST) (Article 279A):** Establishes the GST Council, where states negotiate and compete over taxation policies, striving for a favorable business environment.

5. **Role of Finance Commission (Article 280):** It is appointed every five years to recommend rule-based sharing of Union revenues using objective criteria like income gap, population, geographic size, and fiscal capacity.

## 6. Judicial Safeguards on Governors:

- In **State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary (2023)**, the Court held that Governors cannot stall legislation through inaction.
- In **State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor (2025)**, prolonged delay in assent was declared unconstitutional.

7. **Protection from Misuse of Article 356:** The **S.R. Bommai judgment** limited misuse of central power to dismiss State governments.

8. **Ensuring Neutral Constitutional Roles:** Governors must not act as parallel political authorities over elected State governments.

9. **NITI Aayog (Executive Initiative, Replacing Planning Commission):** Encourages a competitive approach through performance-based rankings, incentives, and best governance practices among states.

## Way Forward

1. **Strengthening Fiscal Federalism:** Finance Commission recommendations should be made more binding to ensure fair and rule-based distribution.

2. **Time-bound Decision by Governors:** A fixed statutory timeline, such as three months, can ensure timely assent to Bills.

3. **Restoring Trust in the Federal System:** Institutional reforms are needed to address concerns of States and ensure fair participation.

## 4. Fiscal Reforms

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

## 5. Political and Democratic Reforms

- **Revitalising Inter-State Council (Article 263):** It should function as an active forum for cooperation rather than a ceremonial body.
- Respect electoral mandates of State governments.
- Promote cooperative federalism through NITI Aayog and policy councils.

## Conclusion

The "double-engine" idea raises serious constitutional concerns when it links development with political alignment. Federalism requires equal treatment of all States and citizens. While institutions exist, their effective

functioning is essential. Development must depend on rules and fairness, not political alignment. This balance is central to preserving the spirit of India's federal democracy.

**Question for practice:**

Evaluate whether the idea of "double-engine governance" strengthens cooperative federalism or poses challenges to India's federal balance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

**India must use the AYUSH opportunity**

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

**Introduction**

India is pushing AYUSH into the mainstream through higher funding, new institutes, and global trade openings. The India-EU FTA expands its global reach. This shift brings both opportunity and responsibility. If India wants AYUSH to succeed globally, it must combine tradition with strong scientific proof, regulatory standards, and credible research systems.

**What is AYUSH?**

- AYUSH stands for Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy.
- These systems are based on traditional medical philosophies. They represent a way of healthy living with established concepts on prevention of diseases and promotion of health.
- In 2015, the Ministry of Ayush had also **included Sowa Rigpa** into the AYUSH system.

**AYUSH Knowledge Systems**

1. **Holistic View of Health:** Systems like Ayurveda see the body as interconnected with environment, diet, and lifestyle, focusing on balance rather than isolated disease.
2. **Different Medical Logic:** Illness is seen as imbalance in relationships, not just a specific defect, unlike modern medicine's focus on targeted causes.
3. **Strength of Biomedicine:** Modern medicine is effective in identifying precise causes and delivering targeted treatments with accuracy.
4. **Complementary Approaches:** AYUSH and modern medicine represent different but valuable frameworks that can expand understanding of health.

**Institutional Framework for AYUSH**

1. The Ministry of AYUSH is the apex body, established in 2014. It promotes and propagates Indian systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy.

2. The **National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB)** coordinates activities relating to conservation, cultivation, marketing, export and policy-making for the development of the medicinal plant's sector.

3. The **Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)** and the **Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH)** are two statutory regulatory bodies. They are responsible for –

- Laying down minimum standards of education,
- Recommending recognition of medical qualifications,
- Registering the practitioners and laying down ethical codes.

### Current Status & Policy Push for AYUSH

1. **Rising Budget Allocation:** The AYUSH Ministry budget has nearly doubled in five years, reaching ₹4,408 crore, showing strong policy priority.

2. **New Institutional Expansion:** Three new All-India Institutes of Ayurveda are planned to set high standards in treatment, education, and research, similar to top modern medical institutions.

3. **Strengthening Infrastructure:** The National AYUSH Mission funding increased by 66% to modernise dispensaries, create AYUSH units in government hospitals, and upgrade drug-testing labs.

4. **Mainstreaming Healthcare Role:** These steps aim to integrate AYUSH into the public health system, rather than keeping it as a separate alternative stream.

### Key Challenges to Realising AYUSH Potential

1. **Need for Scientific Evidence:** Entry into global markets requires **rigorous, independent, and transparent evaluation**, as treatments will be judged under strict regulatory systems.

2. **Risk of Credibility Loss:** If claims move ahead of proof, it can lead to **legal disputes, reputational harm, and reinforcement of 'unscientific' stereotypes**.

3. **Conflict of Interest in Research:** Many studies are funded or overseen by the same institutions that promote AYUSH, creating **structural bias and weak credibility**.

4. **Regulatory Compliance Pressure:** AYUSH products must meet **international standards of safety, manufacturing quality, and claims regulation** to circulate in markets like the EU.

### What should be done?

1. **Independent Research:** Clinical trials must be conducted by independent bodies with transparent methods and peer-reviewed results to ensure credibility.

2. **Regulatory Harmonisation:** Standards for safety, manufacturing, and claims must align with global norms, especially for entry into EU markets.

3. **AYUSH + Biomedicine Complementarity:** The focus should be on coexistence, where both systems work together and expand understanding of health.

4. **Evidence-Based Approach:** All treatments must be validated through rigorous scientific evaluation, and both positive and negative findings should be accepted.

5. **Transparency:** Research processes, funding sources, and methodologies must be open to scrutiny to build global trust.

6. **Institutional Reforms:** Strengthen research institutions, remove conflict of interest, and improve governance for better credibility and accountability.

### Conclusion

India has a strong opportunity to position AYUSH globally through policy support and trade access. However, success depends on scientific validation, regulatory compliance, and institutional credibility. Balancing tradition with evidence will decide its future. Sustainable global expansion requires transparency, independent research, and openness to scrutiny, ensuring AYUSH evolves as a trusted and credible healthcare system worldwide.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the opportunities and challenges in mainstreaming AYUSH in India and its global expansion, and suggest measures to ensure its credibility and effectiveness.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Realising solar power's potential for energy security

Source: The post "Realising solar power's potential for energy security" has been created, based on "Realising solar power's potential for energy security" published in "BusinessLine" on 24th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** India remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels, which exposes the country to global geopolitical uncertainties and energy price volatility. In this context, solar energy has emerged as a critical pillar of India's strategy to improve energy security, with the country expanding its installed solar capacity to nearly 130 GW over the past decade through both large-scale solar parks and decentralised rooftop installations.

### Role of Decentralised Solar Energy in Strengthening Energy Security

Decentralised solar energy contributes to India's energy security in several important ways:

1. Rooftop solar installations reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and thereby improve India's strategic and economic resilience.
2. Decentralised solar systems generate electricity close to the point of consumption, which reduces transmission and distribution losses significantly.
3. Rooftop solar installations reduce the need for expensive long-distance transmission infrastructure required for large-scale solar parks located in remote areas.
4. Government initiatives such as the PM Surya Ghar scheme encourage household participation in energy generation and promote energy self-sufficiency at the local level.

5. Decentralised solar systems can support the transition toward electric mobility by supplying clean electricity for EV charging.

### Challenges Associated with Decentralised Solar Energy

Despite its advantages, decentralised solar generation creates several operational and financial challenges:

1. Electricity distribution networks in India were originally designed for one-way power flows from centralised plants to consumers, and they face difficulties in handling bidirectional flows from rooftop solar installations.
2. Large-scale rooftop solar integration can lead to voltage fluctuations and grid instability during periods of high solar generation.
3. Distribution companies experience revenue losses when residential consumers offset their electricity purchases through net metering mechanisms.
4. Several State governments have introduced additional charges and regulatory restrictions that reduce the attractiveness of rooftop solar installations.
5. There exists a mismatch between daytime solar generation and evening peak electricity demand, which leads to surplus power being exported to the grid during the day and imported at night.

### Way Forward

Linking decentralised solar generation with EV charging infrastructure can help address many of these challenges:

1. EV charging during daytime hours can absorb surplus electricity generated by rooftop solar installations and reduce reverse power flows into the grid.
2. Such integration can reduce stress on distribution networks and improve grid stability.
3. Expanding EV charging infrastructure under schemes such as the PM-DRIVE initiative can accelerate India's transition toward clean transportation.
4. Community-level pooling of rooftop solar power in residential colonies and apartment complexes can enable the establishment of shared EV charging stations.
5. Successful examples such as the integration of solar generation with EV fleets at VOC Port in Tuticorin demonstrate the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of this model.

**Conclusion:** Decentralised solar energy has the potential to significantly strengthen India's energy security while supporting the clean energy transition. Linking rooftop solar generation with local EV charging infrastructure can improve grid stability, enhance renewable energy utilisation, and promote sustainable mobility in an integrated and efficient manner.

**Question:** Decentralised solar energy can strengthen India's energy security but also creates grid management challenges. Discuss. How can linking rooftop solar generation with EV charging infrastructure help address these challenges?

**Source:** [BusinessLine](#)

## The other Ether-blend solution: How DME could ease India's LPG crisis

**Source:** The post "The other Ether-blend solution: How DME could ease India's LPG crisis" has been created, based on "The other Ether-blend solution: How DME could ease India's LPG crisis" published in "Economic Times" on 24th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Economy

**Context:** India imports a significant proportion of its Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) requirements, which exposes the country to global supply disruptions and price volatility. In this context, blending **Dimethyl ether (DME)** with LPG has emerged as a promising strategy to enhance energy security, promote cleaner fuel use, and reduce dependence on imports.

### Significance of DME Blending for India's Energy Security

- 1. Reduction in Import Dependence:** DME can be produced domestically from coal, biomass, natural gas, and municipal waste, which helps reduce India's dependence on imported LPG.
- 2. Cleaner Combustion Characteristics:** DME burns with lower particulate emissions and produces less soot compared to conventional fuels, which supports India's clean cooking energy transition.
- 3. Compatibility with Existing Infrastructure:** DME can be transported and stored using existing LPG cylinders and distribution networks with minor technical adjustments, which reduces infrastructure costs.
- 4. Promotion of Energy Self-Reliance:** Domestic production of DME supports the objective of achieving energy self-reliance under the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- 5. Support to Waste-to-Energy and Rural Economy:** Production of DME from agricultural residues and municipal waste can promote waste-to-energy initiatives and generate additional rural income opportunities.

### Challenges in Implementing DME-LPG Blending

- 1. Lower Energy Density Compared to LPG:** DME has a lower calorific value than LPG, which means a larger quantity is required to produce the same amount of energy.
- 2. Requirement of Appliance Modifications:** Higher blending ratios of DME may require modifications in cooking appliances and storage systems to ensure safety and efficiency.
- 3. Limited Domestic Production Capacity:** India currently lacks large-scale infrastructure for the commercial production of DME.
- 4. Regulatory and Safety Framework Gaps:** Existing regulatory standards and safety protocols for blending, storage, and transportation of DME need further strengthening.
- 5. Low Consumer Awareness:** Consumer awareness regarding the safety and performance of DME-blended LPG remains limited, which may slow adoption.

### Policy Measures Required for Successful Adoption

**1. Promotion of Pilot Demonstration Projects:** The government should promote pilot projects to test higher blending ratios and demonstrate the technical feasibility of DME blending.

**2. Incentives for Domestic Production Facilities:** Financial incentives should be provided for establishing DME production plants using coal, biomass, and waste-based feedstocks.

**3. Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks:** Regulatory standards should be updated to ensure safe blending, transportation, and distribution practices.

**4. Integration into Oil Marketing Company Strategies:** Public sector oil marketing companies should incorporate DME blending into their long-term fuel diversification strategies.

**5. Consumer Awareness and Capacity Building:** Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to build consumer confidence in the safety and reliability of DME-blended LPG.

**Conclusion:** Blending DME with LPG offers a practical and scalable pathway to reduce India's import dependence, promote cleaner cooking energy, and strengthen domestic energy security. With appropriate policy support and infrastructure development, DME can become an important component of India's diversified energy transition strategy.

**Question:** India is exploring Dimethyl Ether (DME) blending with LPG to reduce import dependence and strengthen energy security. Examine the potential benefits, challenges, and policy measures required for its successful adoption.

**Source:** [Economic Times](#)

### A Decade of Building India's TB Champion Movement

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health,

#### Introduction

India diagnoses and treats over **25 lakh TB cases every year**, yet stigma and social exclusion remain strong barriers. Early responses focused mainly on clinical care and ignored lived experiences. Over the last decade, the **TB Champion movement has emerged as a community-driven response**, where survivors support others and improve awareness. At the same time, new diagnostic tools and policies are expanding India's efforts to eliminate TB.

#### Current Status of TB in India

**1. High disease burden and social impact:** India treats **over 25 lakh TB patients annually**, but patients continue to face stigma, isolation, and discrimination during treatment.

**2. Stigma across vulnerable groups:** Stigma affects **women, men, transgender persons, children, adolescents, elderly, and socially vulnerable groups**, reducing care-seeking behaviour.

**3. Undetected cases and transmission risk:** Nearly **1,00,000 TB cases remain undetected each year**, leading to continued spread in communities.

**4. Drug-resistant TB burden:** India contributes **almost one-fourth of global DR-TB cases**, with **1.3–1.5 lakh new cases annually**, making it a major public health concern.

**5. Progress in incidence and treatment coverage:** TB incidence has declined by **21%**, while treatment coverage has improved from **53% to 92%**.

**6. Nature and severity of DR-TB:** DR-TB involves resistance to first-line drugs and requires **long, toxic treatment with lower cure rates and higher mortality**.

### Initiatives and Innovations in TB Control

#### 1. Community-driven initiatives

a) **TB Champion movement:** TB survivors act as **peer supporters and advocates**, challenging the belief that survivors disengage after treatment.

b) **Survivor to Champion training:** A structured curriculum has been **formally adopted under the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)**.

c) **Peer counselling and support:** Champions provide **one-to-one and group counselling**, improving treatment literacy and reducing self-stigma.

c) **Awareness and last-mile outreach:** Community meetings help **dispel myths, spread knowledge on symptoms, and guide people on where to seek care**.

d) **Role during COVID-19:** TB Champions acted as **trusted sources of information on COVID-appropriate behaviour**.

e) **Survivor-led networks:** Networks formed across States act as a **bridge between patients and service providers**, supporting vulnerable groups.

#### 2. System and programme interventions

a) **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP):** Provides **free, high-quality diagnostics and treatment**, improving cure rates and reducing mortality.

b) **Improved case-finding and care models:** Active case-finding and **differentiated care approaches** have strengthened service delivery.

c) **Improved treatment regimens:** Use of **shorter and less toxic treatment regimens** improves patient experience.

d) **Nutrition and patient support:** Expanded nutrition support helps address **treatment challenges and recovery needs**.

#### 3. Technological and diagnostic innovations

a) **WHO recommendations (2025):** The **World Health Organization (WHO)** recommended **near point-of-care molecular tests (NPOC), tongue swab samples, and sputum pooling strategies.**

b) **AI-enabled portable screening:** Portable **chest X-ray (CXR) machines with AI** are used under the **Pradhan Mantri TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan.**

c) **Community-level active screening:** Mobile vans equipped with **portable CXR and AI** enable screening in communities.

d) **Opportunistic screening using AI:** AI algorithms in digital X-rays help identify **TB and other respiratory diseases quickly.**

e) **Shift to molecular testing:** India scaled up **CBNAAT in 2016** and introduced **indigenous Truenat in 2020**, improving detection.

f) **Decentralisation of diagnostics:** Access to molecular testing has expanded to **primary care levels.**

## Challenges and Gaps

### 1. Social and community challenges

a) **Persistent stigma and myths:** Misconceptions continue, causing **delay in diagnosis and treatment avoidance.**

b) **Long-term impact on survivors:** Patients face **physical, social, and economic challenges even after cure.**

c) **Network sustainability concerns:** Survivor-led networks depend on **external funding**, making long-term sustainability uncertain.

### 2. Health system gaps

a) **Uneven diagnostic access:** Molecular testing remains **uneven, especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas.**

b) **Delays in resistance testing:** Delayed diagnosis leads to **empiric first-line treatment and continued transmission.**

c) **Public-private divide:** Differences in care and reporting create **fragmentation and inconsistency.**

d) **Drug stock-outs and weak referrals:** Interruptions in supply and referral systems affect **treatment continuity.**

e) **Weak data systems:** Inconsistent reporting, especially from the private sector, limits **accurate assessment of the crisis.**

### 3. Drug-resistant(DR) TB challenges

a) **Severe treatment burden:** Patients face **nausea, joint pain, hearing loss, psychiatric effects, and fatigue.**

b) **Limited scale-up of new regimens:** Newer **all-oral shorter regimens like BPaLM** are not yet widely accessible.

c) **Socio-economic inequalities:** Poverty, overcrowding, food insecurity, and unstable livelihoods increase **risk and worsen outcomes.**

d) **Wider consequences:** DR-TB leads to **preventable deaths, disability, psychological trauma, high health expenditure, income loss, and intergenerational poverty.**

e) **Public health risks:** Uncontrolled DR-TB can **increase resistance and threaten national health security and economic stability.**

#### 4. Diagnostic and research gaps

a) **Incomplete NAAT coverage:** Achieving **100% NAAT testing before treatment** requires better sample collection and transport systems.

b) **Challenges in key populations:** Diagnosis remains difficult in **children, extra-pulmonary TB (EP-TB), and asymptomatic TB cases.**

c) **Need for new tools:** There is a requirement for **biomarkers, saliva-based tests, and non-sputum diagnostics.**

d) **Limited real-world evidence:** New tools need **implementation research and field testing for scale-up decisions.**

#### Way Forward

##### 1. Strengthening community participation

a) **Expand TB Champion role:** Community engagement can **reduce stigma and improve treatment adherence.**

b) **Develop sustainable networks:** Focus on **self-sustaining socio-economic models for survivor-led groups.**

##### 2. Improving diagnostics and treatment

a) **Universal drug-resistance testing:** Ensure **testing for all TB patients before starting treatment.**

b) **Expand new diagnostic tools:** Scale up **AI-enabled CXR, molecular tests, NPOC tests, and tongue swabs.**

c) **Reduce diagnostic delays:** Improve **sample transport systems and turnaround time.**

##### 3. Comprehensive DR-TB response

a) **Scale up safer regimens:** Accelerate access to **shorter and all-oral treatments like BPaLM (Bedaquiline + Pretomanid + Linezolid + Moxifloxacin).**

b) **Provide holistic care:** Include **mental health care, nutrition support, and income protection.**

c) **Active case finding and prevention:** Focus on **household contacts, children, and latent TB infection (LTBI).**

#### 4. Strengthening governance and systems

a) **Integrate private sector:** Ensure **mandatory reporting, standardised treatment, and accountability.**

b) **Improve monitoring systems:** Strengthen platforms like the **Nikshay Portal** for real-time tracking.

#### 5. Promoting research and innovation

a) **Develop better diagnostics:** Invest in **cost-effective biomarkers and tools for children and EP-TB.**

b) **Support implementation research:** Ensure **evidence-based adoption of new technologies.**

c) **Streamline evaluation and procurement:** Ensure tools are assessed by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** with proper health technology assessment.

#### Conclusion

India's TB response now combines **community leadership, improved diagnostics, and stronger programmes.** The TB Champion movement shows that survivors can drive awareness and support at the grassroots level. However, **DR-TB, stigma, and system gaps remain serious challenges.** A coordinated approach with **early diagnosis, better treatment, strong community participation, and sustained policy commitment** is essential to achieve a TB-free India.

#### Question for practice:

Examine the role of TB Champions, alongside systemic and diagnostic interventions, in strengthening India's efforts to eliminate tuberculosis.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Why the CAPF Bill is a victory for internal security

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

#### Introduction

The CAPF General Administration Bill 2026 strengthens internal security by combining welfare reforms with strong coordination mechanisms. It codifies service rules, ensures transparent promotions, and removes uncertainty in careers. At the same time, it preserves the integrated command structure built on All India

Services. This balance protects national security while addressing long-standing grievances of CAPF personnel across diverse operational conditions.

### Key Features of the CAPF Bill

1. **Single statutory framework:** The Bill replaces fragmented rules and executive instructions with one unified legal system governing CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP and SSB.
2. **Codification of service rules:** Clear rules for recruitment, promotions, postings, transfers, discipline, and grievance redressal become enforceable rights instead of discretionary decisions.
3. **Fixed tenure and transparency:** Field and staff postings follow defined tenure norms, while medical, family and hardship allowances are clearly structured.
4. **Grievance redressal system:** Statutory timelines ensure that complaints are addressed quickly, reducing administrative uncertainty.
5. **Career progression reforms:** Hundreds of new posts at DIG, IG and Additional DG levels are created to reduce stagnation among Group-A officers.
6. **Implementation of OGAS ruling:** The Supreme Court's Orderly Gradation and Seniority system is applied to ensure fair promotion pathways.
7. **Removal of pay disparities:** Long-standing pay-related issues are addressed to bring parity and fairness across ranks.
8. **Coverage of over ten lakh personnel:** The reforms benefit a large workforce, especially constables and lower ranks who form the backbone of CAPFs.

### Significance of the CAPF Bill

1. **Ends administrative uncertainty:** Service conditions earlier depended on discretion, but now legal clarity ensures predictability in careers.
2. **Improves morale and efficiency:** When promotions and postings are rule-based, personnel focus more on operations rather than administrative struggles.
3. **Addresses harsh service conditions:** Jawans operate in forests, deserts, high altitudes and industrial zones, and codified welfare ensures dignity in such conditions.
4. **Strengthens operational coordination:** IPS leadership ensures seamless coordination between state police, CAPFs and intelligence agencies.
5. **Supports federal security structure:** CAPFs assist state police under unified command, maintaining cooperative federalism in internal security.
6. **Enhances intelligence flow:** Ensures real-time intelligence sharing between IB, CAPFs, and state police improves operational response speed.

7. **Builds institutional trust networks:** Officers moving across roles create long-term trust, which converts intelligence into effective action.
8. **Prevents fragmentation of forces:** Unified leadership avoids silo-based functioning, which can delay response and weaken outcomes.
9. **Reflects Patel's steel frame vision:** The Bill sustains national integration by ensuring coordination across diverse regions and forces.

### Debate around the CAPF Bill

1. **Demand for removal of IPS leadership:** Some groups seek complete removal of IPS officers from senior CAPF roles.
2. **Framing as dignity versus discrimination:** The issue is presented as unfair treatment, but this framing is rejected.
3. **Risk to coordination structure:** Removing IPS leadership can break trust networks and weaken intelligence sharing.
4. **Threat of fragmented response:** Insular functioning of forces can delay operations and reduce effectiveness.
5. **Short-term benefit versus national cost:** Faster promotions for a few can create serious long-term risks for national security affecting 1.4 billion people.

### Conclusion

The CAPF General Administration Bill 2026 delivers both fairness and strength to India's internal security system. It ensures clear service rules, better career growth, and improved welfare for personnel. At the same time, it preserves the unified command and coordination essential for effective operations. By maintaining this balance, the Bill protects institutional integrity and national security, ensuring that CAPFs continue to function as a cohesive and reliable force across the country.

### Question for practice:

Discuss how the CAPF General Administration Bill 2026 strengthens internal security while addressing welfare and career concerns of CAPF personnel.

Source: [The Print](#)

### **We need a national mission for negotiated justice**

Source: The post "**We need a national mission for negotiated justice**" has been created, based on "**We need a national mission for negotiated justice**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 25th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Polity & Governance

**Context:** The Indian judicial system is facing a severe backlog of cases, with more than 5 crore cases pending across courts. As noted by Cesare Beccaria, the effectiveness of justice lies in certainty and timeliness rather than severity. In this context, negotiated justice through plea bargaining offers a viable solution.

### Need for a National Mission for Negotiated Justice

1. The Indian judiciary is burdened with an enormous backlog of cases, particularly in district courts where the majority of citizens seek justice.
2. Delays in the justice delivery system undermine the principle of timely justice and often result in prolonged suffering for both victims and the accused.
3. Undertrial prisoners frequently remain in jail for extended periods, which raises serious concerns about personal liberty and fairness.
4. A slow judicial process negatively impacts the economy by weakening contract enforcement and reducing investor confidence.
5. Prolonged litigation leads to emotional and financial distress for litigants, especially in civil disputes such as property and family matters.
6. Persistent delays reduce public trust in the legal system and create a crisis of institutional legitimacy.

### Role of Plea Bargaining in Addressing Delays

1. Plea bargaining helps in the speedy disposal of cases by allowing both parties to reach a mutually agreed settlement without a full trial.
2. It reduces the burden on courts by diverting less serious cases away from lengthy judicial proceedings.
3. The process provides greater certainty and predictability in outcomes compared to traditional trials.
4. Victims benefit from quicker resolution of disputes and timely acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the accused.
5. It enables the judiciary and law enforcement agencies to focus their resources on serious and complex criminal cases.
6. International experience shows that plea bargaining is highly effective, as seen in countries where most criminal cases are settled through negotiated agreements.

### Challenges in India

1. The adoption of plea bargaining in India remains extremely low despite its legal recognition since 2005.
2. There is a lack of awareness among litigants regarding the benefits and implications of negotiated settlements.
3. Prosecutors and defence lawyers often show hesitation due to limited training and institutional support.
4. There are concerns about the possibility of coercion, exploitation, or unfair agreements in the absence of proper safeguards.
5. The current legal and institutional framework does not provide adequate incentives for opting for plea bargaining.

### Way Forward

1. The government should establish a national mission to promote negotiated justice with a clear policy framework and objectives.
2. Prosecutors should be trained to conduct fair and transparent negotiations that protect public interest.

3. The remuneration structure for lawyers should be reformed to encourage early settlement of cases.
4. Judges should actively promote pre-trial settlement mechanisms wherever appropriate.
5. Public awareness campaigns should be undertaken to inform litigants that plea bargaining is a strategic and beneficial option.
6. Strong legal safeguards must be introduced to ensure that all agreements are voluntary and free from coercion.
7. A national protocol should be developed, as suggested by R. Venkataramani, to standardise procedures and ensure transparency.

**Conclusion:** A National Mission for Negotiated Justice can significantly improve the efficiency of India's judicial system by ensuring faster, predictable, and fair outcomes. With proper safeguards and institutional support, plea bargaining can enhance both access to justice and public trust in the legal system.

**Question:** Discuss the need for a National Mission for Negotiated Justice in India. How can plea bargaining help address judicial delays while ensuring fairness?

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

### Women Reservation act and Delimitation

**Source:** The post "**Women Reservation act and Delimitation**" has been created, based on "**Women Reservation act and Delimitation**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 25th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- Polity & Governance

**Context:** The Women's Reservation Act, 2023 aims to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. The Centre is considering delimitation based on the 2011 Census to expedite its implementation before the 2029 elections.

#### Key Features of the Proposed Amendment

1. The government proposes to conduct delimitation using the 2011 Census instead of waiting for the next Census cycle.
2. The total number of Lok Sabha seats is proposed to increase from 543 to 816 seats.
3. Out of the expanded seats, approximately 273 seats will be reserved for women.
4. The proportional representation of states is likely to be maintained to address federal concerns.
5. The amendment seeks to operationalise reservation earlier, instead of delaying it beyond 2030.

#### Significance of the Move

1. The proposal will ensure early implementation of women's reservation, thereby enhancing gender equality in political representation.
2. It will strengthen inclusive democracy by increasing women's participation in law-making processes.
3. The expansion of seats will reduce the zero-sum nature of reservation, as no existing seats will be drastically reduced.
4. It may improve governance outcomes, as greater representation of women has been linked to better policy focus on health, education, and welfare.

5. It reflects political consensus-building, as the government is consulting multiple opposition parties to secure the required majority.

### Challenges and Concerns

1. Using the 2011 Census raises concerns about outdated population data, which may not reflect current demographic realities.
2. Southern states fear that delimitation may disadvantage them despite assurances of maintaining proportional representation.
3. The process requires a constitutional amendment with a two-thirds majority, making political consensus difficult.
4. There are logistical and administrative challenges in redrawing constituencies and expanding legislative bodies.
5. Critics argue that linking reservation to delimitation delays actual implementation, as procedural steps remain complex.
6. There are concerns regarding rotation of reserved seats, which may affect political accountability and continuity.

### Way Forward

1. The government should ensure transparency in the delimitation process to build trust among states.
2. Updated population projections may be used alongside the 2011 Census to address data concerns.
3. A clear timeline should be established for implementation to avoid further delays.
4. Political consensus should be strengthened through wider consultations with all stakeholders.
5. Safeguards should be introduced to balance federal principles and demographic representation.

**Conclusion:** The move to implement the Women's Reservation Act through early delimitation is a significant step towards gender justice. However, its success will depend on balancing efficiency with fairness, federal concerns, and democratic legitimacy.

**Question:** Discuss the significance and challenges of implementing the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 through delimitation based on the 2011 Census.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

## Deepening Global Corruption as a Pointer for India

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications.

### Introduction

The Corruption Perceptions Index 2025 shows a clear global decline in integrity, with the average score falling to **42 out of 100**. A total of **122 out of 182 countries score below 50**, and only **five countries score above 80**, compared to 12 earlier. Corruption is deepening where oversight weakens. India, with a **score of 39 and rank 91**, reflects this stagnation despite rising economic scale.

### Global and Indian Trends in Corruption

1. **Global deterioration in scores:** The global average has dropped to **42**, with **122/182 countries below 50**, showing widespread decline in governance quality.
2. **Decline in high-performing countries:** Only **five countries now score above 80**, compared to **12 a decade ago**, indicating shrinking top performers.
3. **India's stagnant trajectory:** India's score moved narrowly between **38 and 41 over the past decade**, from **38 in 2014 to 39 in 2025**.
4. **India's global ranking:** India stands at **91 out of 182 countries**, placing it in the lower half despite being the **world's fourth-largest economy**.
5. **Comparative country performance:** **China scores 42, Sri Lanka is close to India**, while **Bangladesh and Pakistan score lower**, but India trails several East Asian and European economies.
6. **Role of institutional reform:** Countries with better CPI scores improved through **institutional independence, transparency frameworks, and regulatory predictability**.

### Why CPI Matters for India

1. **Nature of the index:** CPI measures **perceived public sector integrity**, not actual corruption cases.
2. **Multiple data sources:** It uses **13 independent data sources** covering procurement, regulation, judiciary, and safeguards.
3. **Signal of governance gaps:** A score of **39 indicates weaknesses in transparency, oversight, and accountability**.
4. **Impact on economic decisions:** CPI affects **investment decisions, sovereign risk assessments, and long-term capital allocation**.
5. **Governance as economic variable:** Governance credibility now acts as a **competitive economic factor influencing growth outcomes**.

### Impacts of Corruption

1. **Global economic burden:** Corruption costs at least **5% of global GDP**, equivalent to over **\$2.6 trillion annually**, including bribes and inefficiencies.
2. **India's direct economic loss:** Corruption leads to around **0.5% of GDP loss annually** in direct terms.
3. **Total economic impact in India:** Including indirect effects, losses rise to **1%–1.5% of GDP**, amounting to **tens of billions of dollars each year**.
4. **Reduced economic efficiency:** Corruption increases **transaction uncertainty and compliance costs**, lowering productivity.

5. **Misallocation of resources:** It diverts efforts towards **rent-seeking instead of value creation**, affecting growth.
6. **Loss of public trust:** It weakens **fiscal efficiency, regulatory credibility, and social trust**, creating long-term institutional damage.

### Challenges to Overcome Corruption

1. **Extensive legal burden:** There are **26,134 imprisonment provisions** across India's business regulations.
2. **High compliance requirements:** A pharmaceutical start-up must comply with **998 obligations before starting operations**.
3. **Criminalisation in regulation:** Nearly **49% of these compliances carry criminal liability**, increasing risk for businesses.
4. **Policy and compliance mismatch:** Even with **₹10,000 crore allocation under the SHAKTI initiative (Union Budget 2026–27)**, regulatory burdens remain high.
5. **Expansion of discretion:** Complex rules increase **official discretion**, creating conditions for rent seeking.

### What Should Be Done

1. **Digital public infrastructure impact:** Direct Benefit Transfers linked to bank accounts and digital identity have **reduced leakages in welfare schemes**.
2. **Growth in digital payments:** The **RBI Digital Payments Index (base March 2018)** increased from **493.22 (March 2025)** to **516.76 (September 2025)**.
3. **Improved tax transparency:** The **Goods and Services Tax network** has increased **formalisation and traceability** in indirect taxation.
4. **Reduction in corruption opportunities:** E-procurement systems and digital payments reduce **human discretion and rent-seeking scope**.
5. **Need for institutional strengthening:** Improvements are required in **transparency, judicial efficiency, regulatory simplification, and institutional independence**.
6. **Balance between growth and governance:** Rapid economic expansion without parallel governance reforms creates **structural imbalance**.

### Conclusion

The CPI 2025 should be seen as a benchmark, not a verdict. India has strong constitutional foundations, competitive elections, a capable judiciary, and growing digital capacity. Sustained improvements in transparency, judicial efficiency, regulatory design, and institutional independence can improve outcomes.

Countries improved through continuous reform. India's governance must match its economic ambition to ensure balanced and durable progress.

**Question for practice:**

**Evaluate** how the **global decline in corruption control reflected in the CPI 2025** highlights India's governance challenges, and examine its economic implications and required reforms.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### The judicial push for environmental CSR

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Environment

#### Introduction

India made CSR mandatory through the Companies Act, 2013 to direct corporate profits toward social good. However, environmental concerns remain underfunded despite rising climate challenges and the net-zero target for 2070. The Supreme Court has now reframed environmental CSR as a constitutional duty under Article 51A(g), linking business operations with ecological responsibility and pushing companies to prioritise restoration over voluntary charity.

#### What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

1. **Meaning of CSR:** CSR is a management concept where companies integrate social and environmental concerns into business operations and stakeholder interactions. It reflects responsibility toward society and the environment.
2. **Triple Bottom Line Approach:** CSR balances economic, social, and environmental goals. It aligns business growth with sustainability and stakeholder expectations.
3. **Link with Sustainability and ESG:** CSR supports long-term value creation by integrating environmental, social, and governance concerns. It ensures responsible and ethical business conduct.

#### Statutory Framework in India

1. **Legal Mandate:** India became the first country to mandate CSR through **Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013** and the **Companies (CSR Policy) Rules, 2014**.
2. **Eligibility Criteria:** CSR applies to companies with **net worth ₹500 crore, turnover ₹1,000 crore, or net profit ₹5 crore** in the previous financial year.
3. **2% Spending Requirement:** Eligible companies must spend at least **2% of their average net profits of the last three years** on CSR activities.
4. **Permitted Activities under Schedule VII of the Act:** CSR includes areas like education, healthcare, rural development, and **environmental sustainability, ecological balance, and conservation of natural resources**, along with support to welfare funds and research.

5. **Compliance and Penalties:** India moved to a “**comply or be penalised**” model in 2021. Unspent funds must be transferred to an **Unspent CSR Account within 30 days** and used within **3 years**, or transferred to a government fund within **6 months**.
6. **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** Companies face penalties of **twice the unspent amount or ₹1 crore (whichever is less)**. Defaulting officers are liable for **1/10th of the unspent amount or ₹2 lakh (whichever is less)**.

### Structural Challenges in Environmental Restoration

1. **Skewed CSR Allocation:** CSR funds favour social sectors with **education (38%), healthcare (22%), and rural development (10%)**, while environment gets only **7–9%**. This shows a strong human-centric bias.
2. **Restoration Gap:** Under the **Bonn Challenge** (global target: **350 million hectares by 2030**), India aims to restore **26 million hectares by 2030**, but private sector contribution is only **2% of 9.8 million hectares restored so far**.
3. **Preference for Quick Wins:** Companies support awareness campaigns and basic green activities because they give quick results and easy reporting. Long-term restoration projects are avoided.
4. **Complex Nature of Restoration:** Activities like afforestation, habitat recovery, and water conservation take time and need expertise in soil, biodiversity, and ecology. Many CSR partners lack such skills.
5. **Ecological Concerns in Practices:** Rapid methods like Miyawaki plantations are preferred for visibility, but they often compromise native ecology and biodiversity.
6. **Institutional and Policy Gaps:** There is an urban bias in project selection, lack of practical policies for degraded lands, and poor coordination with forest departments and organisations.

### Judicial Intervention and Constitutional Mandate

1. **Shift from Charity to Duty:** The Supreme Court reframed environmental CSR as a constitutional obligation. It linked business rights with environmental responsibility.
2. **Article 51A(g):** The Court invoked the duty to protect and improve the environment. It made ecological responsibility an integral part of corporate conduct.
3. **Trigger for Judicial Action:** Neglect of the **Great Indian Bustard habitat** by energy firms led to judicial intervention. It highlighted the consequences of ignoring ecological concerns.
4. **Impact of Judicial Push:** Environmental protection is no longer optional. It has become a mandatory aspect of corporate accountability and governance.

### What should be done?

1. **Ecosystem Recovery Approach:** CSR must shift from short-term activities to long-term ecological restoration. Focus should be on restoring natural systems.
2. **New Success Indicators:** Performance should be measured through **soil carbon sequestration, water retention, and biodiversity recovery**. These reflect real ecological impact.
3. **Focus on Degraded Lands:** Priority should be given to remote and degraded forest areas that lack resources. This ensures better ecological outcomes.
4. **Institutional Collaboration:** Strong partnerships are needed between forest departments, universities, NGOs, and joint forest management committees. This brings scientific expertise.
5. **Scientific Restoration Units:** Dedicated units under expert supervision should guide restoration. They must focus on native species and ecological balance.
6. **Long-term Financing Mechanism:** Creation of a **restoration trust or escrow fund** can ensure continuous funding. It supports long-term projects and stability.
7. **Governance Transformation:** Corporate governance must move from shareholder focus to ecosystem focus. Directors should act as fiduciaries of the environment.

### Conclusion

Environmental CSR must move beyond compliance and short-term visibility. The judicial push has made ecological responsibility a constitutional duty. A shift toward ecosystem-centric governance is necessary. Long-term restoration, scientific planning, and sustained financing must guide corporate action. Treating environmental protection as a non-negotiable business priority will help achieve balanced and sustainable development in India.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the judicial push for environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India and examine the challenges and measures needed to strengthen ecosystem-based CSR.

Source: The Hindu

### Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Source: The post "Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026" has been created, based on "Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026" published in "Indian express" on 26th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

**Context:** The **Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** proposes amendments primarily to the **Companies Act, 2013** and the **Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008** with the objective of streamlining regulatory processes, reducing criminal liability for procedural lapses, and improving the ease of doing business in India.

### Key Provisions

### 1. Changes in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- a. The Bill proposes to increase the CSR applicability threshold based on net profit from ₹5 crore to ₹10 crore in order to reduce the compliance burden on smaller companies.
- b. It retains the existing eligibility criteria relating to companies having a net worth of ₹500 crore or turnover of ₹1,000 crore for CSR applicability.
- c. The Bill extends the time period for transferring unspent CSR funds related to ongoing projects from 30 days to 90 days to provide greater operational flexibility to companies.
- d. It also provides exemptions from certain CSR provisions for small companies to support their growth and reduce compliance pressure.

### 2. Decriminalisation of Offences

- a. The Bill proposes to shift 21 offences under corporate law from criminal liability to monetary penalties in order to promote a trust-based regulatory regime.
- b. It replaces imprisonment provisions for several procedural violations with financial penalties to reduce unnecessary litigation.
- c. It introduces an electronic adjudication mechanism to ensure transparency and reduce discretion in enforcement actions.

### 3. Hybrid Corporate Governance Meetings

- a. The Bill enables companies to conduct Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs) through video conferencing and other audio-visual means.
- b. It mandates that companies must hold at least one physical AGM once every three years to maintain shareholder engagement in physical mode as well.

### 4. Relief Measures for Small Companies

- a. The Bill provides exemptions to small companies from certain CSR obligations in order to reduce compliance costs.
- b. It relaxes requirements relating to auditor appointments for small companies to simplify governance procedures.
- c. It also reduces additional fees payable for delayed filings by small companies to encourage compliance.

### 5. Replacement of Affidavits with Self-Declarations

- a. The Bill allows certain affidavits required under the Companies Act to be replaced with self-declarations in order to simplify documentation requirements.
- b. This change is expected to reduce procedural delays and administrative burdens for companies.

### 6. Conversion of Trusts into Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)

- a. The Bill introduces a framework for the conversion of specified trusts registered under regulatory authorities such as SEBI and IFSC authorities into LLPs.
- b. This provision aims to improve flexibility in organisational restructuring within the financial sector.

### 7. Expansion of Regulatory Powers

- a. The Bill allows the Central Government to classify different categories of companies for regulatory purposes across various provisions of corporate law.
- b. It also expands the regulatory role of bodies such as the **National Financial Reporting Authority** in ensuring compliance and oversight.

## Challenges

### 1. Excessive Delegation of Legislative Powers

- a. Critics argue that the Bill delegates several essential legislative functions to subordinate legislation without providing adequate guidance from Parliament.
- b. Important matters such as CSR thresholds, compliance classifications, audit obligations, and penalty frameworks may be determined through executive rules instead of primary legislation.
- c. This may raise concerns regarding violation of constitutional principles relating to delegated legislation.

### 2. Increased Executive Control Over Regulators

- a. The Bill allows the Central Government to issue directions to regulatory authorities and classify companies differently across regulatory provisions.
- b. Critics argue that such provisions may weaken the autonomy of statutory regulators like the National Financial Reporting Authority.

### 3. Dilution of CSR Framework

- a. The increase in CSR applicability thresholds may reduce the number of companies covered under CSR obligations.
- b. This may potentially weaken corporate participation in social development initiatives.

### 4. Weakening of Corporate Accountability

- a. The replacement of criminal penalties with monetary penalties for certain offences may reduce deterrence against corporate non-compliance.
- b. Critics argue that such changes may weaken the accountability framework under corporate governance laws.

**5. Concerns Regarding Shareholder Participation:** Although hybrid meetings improve accessibility, there are concerns that excessive reliance on virtual meetings may reduce meaningful shareholder engagement in corporate decision-making processes.

## Significance

### 1. Promotion of Ease of Doing Business

- a. The Bill simplifies compliance procedures and reduces criminal liability for procedural lapses, which may encourage entrepreneurship and business expansion.
- b. It supports the formalisation of MSMEs by reducing regulatory burdens on smaller companies.

### 2. Strengthening Digital Corporate Governance

- a. The institutionalisation of hybrid meetings promotes the use of digital governance mechanisms in corporate administration.
- b. It enhances accessibility for shareholders located across different geographical regions.

### 3. Rationalisation of CSR Framework

- a. The revision of CSR thresholds reflects changes in India's economic conditions since the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013.
- b. It helps emerging companies allocate more resources towards growth during their expansion phase.

**4. Encouragement of Corporate Restructuring Flexibility:** The introduction of provisions allowing conversion of specified trusts into LLPs promotes flexibility in organisational structures within regulated financial sectors.

### 5. Alignment with Modern Regulatory Practices

- a. The shift from criminal enforcement to civil penalties for minor procedural violations aligns India's corporate governance framework with global regulatory practices.
- b. It improves transparency through the adoption of electronic adjudication mechanisms.

**Conclusion:** The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 represents an important step towards simplifying corporate compliance and promoting business growth; however, concerns relating to delegated legislation, regulatory autonomy, and CSR dilution require careful examination to ensure that corporate governance standards remain strong and balanced.

**Question:** The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to promote ease of doing business while ensuring corporate accountability. Discuss its key provisions, associated concerns, and overall significance.

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

### PSUs and insolvency

**Source:** The post "PSUs and insolvency" has been created, based on "PSUs and insolvency" published in "BusinessLine" on 26th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** The **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)** was enacted to provide a time-bound framework for insolvency resolution of corporate entities in India. The Code applies uniformly to companies irrespective of whether they are privately owned or government owned. However, the recent insolvency proceedings involving **Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited (CNNL)** have revived the debate regarding whether Public Sector Enterprises performing sovereign or essential public functions should be exempt from insolvency proceedings.

### Issues over applicability of IBC to Public Sector Enterprises performing sovereign functions

1. Some Public Sector Enterprises argue that insolvency proceedings against them may disrupt essential public services that are necessary for public welfare.

2. They contend that certain enterprises function as implementing agencies of government policies rather than as commercial profit-oriented entities.
3. They further argue that subjecting such enterprises to insolvency proceedings may interfere with the constitutional responsibilities of the State.
4. This issue gained prominence in **Hindustan Construction Company Limited v. Union of India**, where the Supreme Court observed that statutory bodies such as the **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** perform important public functions and therefore cannot be subjected to liquidation under the IBC framework.

### Significance of the issue

1. The issue is significant because a large number of Public Sector Enterprises in India are currently facing financial stress and operational inefficiencies.
2. The 16th Finance Commission Report (2026–31) highlights concerns about the financial condition of both State and Central Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs).
3. Out of 1,107 State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs), around 541 are either incurring losses or reporting zero net profits.
4. A considerable number of these enterprises are also non-operational, indicating inefficiency and underutilisation.
5. Nearly half of the State Public Sector Enterprises are either loss-making or non-operational according to recent fiscal assessments.
6. The aggregate losses of State Public Sector Enterprises are estimated to be approximately ₹1.14 lakh crore.
7. Loss-making Central Public Sector Enterprises have recorded annual losses exceeding ₹51,000 crore.
8. The electricity distribution sector alone has accumulated outstanding debt of more than ₹7 lakh crore.
9. These figures highlight the urgent need for financial restructuring and improved accountability mechanisms in Public Sector Enterprises.

### Arguments in favour of exempting PSEs from IBC proceedings

1. Public Sector Enterprises operating in sectors such as irrigation, electricity distribution, and transport infrastructure provide essential services that directly affect citizens and economic stability.
2. Subjecting such enterprises to insolvency proceedings may disrupt the delivery of essential public services.
3. Certain Public Sector Enterprises function primarily as instruments of government policy implementation rather than as independent commercial entities.
4. Applying insolvency proceedings to such enterprises may interfere with the discharge of sovereign responsibilities of the State.
5. Liquidation or restructuring of such enterprises under the IBC framework may adversely affect long-term infrastructure development objectives of the government.

### Arguments against granting exemption to PSEs from IBC

1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code does not distinguish between private companies and government companies at the stage of admission of insolvency proceedings.
2. Allowing exemptions to Public Sector Enterprises may weaken the principle of ownership neutrality embedded in the Code.

3. Such exemptions may create moral hazard by encouraging fiscal indiscipline and delayed payments to contractors and lenders.
4. Exemptions may also reduce investor and creditor confidence while dealing with government enterprises.
5. The IBC framework is primarily a resolution mechanism and therefore it can support restructuring and revival of distressed Public Sector Enterprises rather than merely leading to liquidation.

### **Institutional concerns emerging from the controversy**

1. Questions have emerged regarding whether the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** has the institutional capacity to determine whether a particular Public Sector Enterprise performs sovereign functions.
2. Frequent intervention by High Courts in such disputes leads to fragmentation of the insolvency resolution timeline envisaged under the IBC framework.
3. The absence of a clear statutory definition of sovereign function under the IBC creates ambiguity and results in inconsistent judicial interpretations across cases.

### **Way Forward**

1. There is a need to clearly define the scope of sovereign functions under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to avoid ambiguity in its implementation.
2. A sector-specific insolvency resolution framework should be developed for Public Sector Enterprises engaged in essential public services.
3. Governments should strengthen financial discipline in Public Sector Enterprises through performance audits and accountability mechanisms.
4. Persistently loss-making and non-operational Public Sector Enterprises should be considered for closure, privatisation, or asset monetisation wherever appropriate through structured use of the IBC mechanism.

**Conclusion:** A balanced approach is required to ensure that essential sovereign functions remain protected while Public Sector Enterprises continue to remain accountable to creditors and financial discipline. Clear legislative guidance regarding the applicability of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to Public Sector Enterprises will help maintain the balance between public purpose and commercial responsibility.

**Question:** Can Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) invoke sovereign functions to avoid insolvency proceedings under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)? Examine the constitutional, economic, and institutional implications.

**Source:** [BusinessLine](#)

## **The Transgender Persons Amendment Bill is a flawed fix**

**UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-** mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

### **Introduction**

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 is presented as a corrective step to the 2019 law. However, it narrows identity, removes self-determination, and increases state control. It ignores key distinctions between sex and gender, and between intersex and transgender persons. Instead of solving existing problems, it creates new legal, social, and ethical concerns, making it a flawed reform.

### Background of The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026

- (a) **Origin in the 2019 Act and NALSA judgment:** The 2019 Act followed the Supreme Court's NALSA judgment which recognised **self-perceived gender identity as a fundamental right** and rejected medical conditions for legal recognition.
- (b) **Purpose of the 2026 Amendment:** The amendment claims to fix vagueness and implementation issues in the 2019 Act, but it changes core principles and shifts focus from rights to control.

### Key Changes Introduced by the 2026 Amendment

- (a) **Narrow definition of transgender identity:** The Bill limits transgender identity to specific socio-cultural groups like **hijra, kinner, aravani, jogta, eunuch**, and intersex variations, excluding **gender-fluid and non-heteronormative identities**.
- (b) **Removal of self-perceived gender identity:** The right to self-identify gender under Section 4(2) is deleted, weakening a core constitutional principle of personal autonomy.
- (c) **Introduction of medical board certification:** A **medical authority led by a Chief Medical Officer** replaces the District Magistrate process, making identity recognition dependent on medical approval.
- (d) **Mandatory reporting of surgeries:** Hospitals must report all transgender surgeries to authorities, raising serious concerns about **privacy and surveillance**.
- (e) **Retrospective exclusion clause:** The Bill declares that persons with different sexual orientations were never included, creating uncertainty for **over 32,000 issued certificates**.

### Major Concerns related to The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026

#### 1. Conceptual and Classification Issues

- (a) **Confusion between sex and gender identity:** The Bill wrongly treats **male and female as gender identities**, while they are sex categories, leading to flawed policy design.
- (b) **Conflation of intersex and transgender identities:** The Bill includes intersex persons under "transgender," even though **intersex is a biological variation (1-2% globally) and transgender is a social and psychological identity**. This erases intersex-specific needs and protections and goes against **global standards (UN, WHO)** that recognise them as distinct categories.
- (c) **Lack of reliable data:** There is no proper data on transgender and intersex persons, making policy design weak and ineffective.

## 2. Violation of Rights and Constitutional Principles

- (a) **Attack on self-determination:** Removing self-identification violates principles laid down under **Article 21** and the NALSA judgment.
- (b) **Privacy concerns due to medical reporting:** Mandatory sharing of surgery details lacks purpose and safeguards, violating **informational privacy standards**.
- (c) **Retrospective denial of identity:** The clause stating identities “shall never have been included” attempts to **invalidate previously granted transgender certificates (over 32,000)**, creating legal uncertainty and undermining already recognised rights.
- (d) **No ban on non-consensual surgeries:** Thousands of intersex infants face **forced, unethical surgeries**, yet the Bill provides no prohibition.

## 3. Medicalisation and Administrative Barriers

- (a) **Two-stage medical certification process:** The requirement of a medical board and further review creates delays, uncertainty, and no clear criteria.
- (b) **No scientific basis for gender determination:** There is **no medical test to prove gender**, yet individuals must undergo evaluation.
- (c) **Insurance and access trap:** Recognition is required for healthcare access, but medical procedures are needed for recognition, creating a **circular barrier**.

## 4. Institutional and Policy Gaps

- (a) **Outdated institutional framework:** The Bill retains bodies like the National Council for Transgender Persons and ignores proposals for **Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics (GIESC)-based reform**.
- (b) **Promotion of a single identity framework:** It continues a **heteronormative approach**, ignoring diverse identities and sexual orientations.
- (c) **Lack of consultation:** Key bodies like the **National Council for Transgender Persons were not consulted**, which is meant to advise on such laws. This weakens participatory and inclusive policymaking.

## 5. Legalisation of Exploitative Structures

- (a) **Ignoring hijra jamath-gharana system:** The Bill penalises external coercion but does not regulate internal systems where **bonded labour and exploitation exist**.
- (b) **Vulnerability of gender non-conforming children:** Many children are forced into begging and prostitution, yet there is **no rehabilitation or protection framework**.
- (c) **Weak law enforcement response:** Police often fail to register missing complaints, increasing risks of trafficking and abuse.

## 6. Criminalisation and Misplaced Penal Provisions

- (a) **Harsh penalties based on flawed assumptions:** The Bill assumes transgender identity is forced and introduces punishments up to **life imprisonment**.
- (b) **Imbalance in legal protection:** Punishment for crimes against transgender persons remains low (6 months–2 years), while alleged coercion into transgender identity attracts **5 years to life imprisonment**, creating a clear internal imbalance in legal protection.
- (c) **Risk to support systems:** Vague definitions of “forcing or inducing transgender identity” may criminalise **social workers, NGOs, and chosen families** who support individuals, as their assistance can be misinterpreted as coercion.

## 7. Exclusion from Civil and Family Rights

- (a) **No recognition in family law:** There are no provisions for **marriage, adoption, inheritance, or divorce**.
- (b) **Denial of full citizenship:** Without these rights, transgender persons remain excluded from core social institutions.

## Conclusion

The Amendment strengthens penalties but ignores structural flaws. It removes self-identity, confuses key concepts, and neglects intersex and civil rights. It also legitimises exploitative systems and increases state control. A better approach requires separating sex and gender, banning non-consensual surgeries, ensuring full rights, and building an inclusive, evidence-based framework that protects dignity and equality.

## Question for practice:

Evaluate whether the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 effectively addresses the gaps of the 2019 Act or creates new legal and social challenges for transgender and intersex persons.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## What is at stake at the WTO's MC14?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

## Introduction

The WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) is taking place at a time when **trade multilateralism is under serious strain and unilateral actions are rising sharply**. As the WTO's highest decision-making body, MC14 will decide the **future direction of global trade rules, dispute settlement system, and core principles like Most Favoured Nation (MFN) and Special and Differential Treatment (SDT)**, especially when major powers are openly questioning and challenging the existing multilateral framework.

## Changing Global Trade Context

1. **Rising geopolitical tensions:** Global trade is influenced by **U.S.–China rivalry, global conflicts, and securitisation**, which has reduced cooperation among countries.
2. **Decline of multilateralism:** There is a clear shift from **rules-based multilateralism to unilateral actions**, weakening collective decision-making.
3. **Tariff weaponisation by the U.S.:** The U.S. has imposed **arbitrary tariffs violating MFN and bound tariff rules**, undermining WTO's core principles.
4. **Rise of coercive trade deals:** The U.S. is using **tariff pressure to sign one-sided agreements**, replacing fair and equal trade norms.

### Structural Crisis of the WTO

1. **Loss of U.S. trust in WTO:** The U.S. believes WTO has **not served its interests**, especially after China's rapid rise.
2. **China's economic rise:** China's growth has **narrowed the gap with the U.S.**, and its state-led policies remain a concern.
3. **Paralysis of dispute settlement:** The U.S. has **blocked Appellate Body appointments**, making the WTO's dispute system ineffective.
4. **Weak rule-making record:** In nearly **30 years, only two agreements (Trade Facilitation and Fisheries Subsidies)** have been concluded, showing limited progress.
5. **Consensus-based decision-making issue:** The need for full consensus has made **decision-making slow and difficult**, delaying reforms.
6. **Shift towards alternative platforms:** Due to WTO inefficiency, countries are increasingly relying on **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** for faster rule-making.

### Key Issues Before MC14

1. **Plurilateral agreements debate:** Agreements like **Investment Facilitation for Development (supported by 120+ countries)** and **E-commerce Agreement** may be added to WTO rules.
2. **Risk of system fragmentation:** Countries like India argue plurilateral deals may **divide the WTO system and weaken multilateralism**.
3. **E-commerce moratorium challenge:** The **1998 moratorium on digital tariffs** may lead to **revenue loss for developing countries** if continued.
4. **Special and Differential Treatment (SDT):** SDT ensures **special rights for developing and least developed countries**, but the U.S. wants to deny these benefits to large developing economies.
5. **Need for dispute settlement reform:** Restoring the **Appellate Body is essential to revive trust and ensure enforcement of WTO rules**.
6. **Threat to core principles:** There is a risk to **MFN and non-discrimination principles**, which ensure fairness in global trade.

### What is Fundamentally at Stake?

1. **Future of WTO as an institution:** MC14 will determine whether the WTO remains a **functional rule-making and dispute-settlement body or becomes irrelevant.**
2. **Shift towards power-based trade order:** There is a growing risk of moving from **rule-based trade to coercion-based trade**, where stronger countries dominate outcomes.
3. **Risk of fragmentation:** Growth of plurilateral agreements may create a **divided and less unified trade system.**
4. **Impact on developing countries:** Weakening rules may reduce **policy space, revenue, and bargaining power** of developing economies.
5. **Erosion of key principles:** Core principles like **MFN and SDT are under threat**, affecting fairness and inclusiveness.

### India's Role and Strategic Choices

1. **Leadership of Global South:** India should act as a **normative leader for developing countries**, defending multilateralism and collective interests.
2. **Alliance building:** India must **work with developing and least developed countries** to create a strong negotiating bloc at MC14.
3. **Revisiting policy positions:** India should reconsider its **strong opposition to plurilateral agreements** for practical outcomes.
4. **Support dispute reform:** India should strongly push for **restoring the Appellate Body**, including exploring alternative methods like voting.
5. **Defence of core principles:** India must protect **SDT and MFN**, which are crucial for developing countries.

### Conclusion

MC14 is a decisive moment for global trade. It will determine whether **multilateralism survives or unilateralism dominates**. Failure to act will strengthen coercive trade practices and weaken developing countries. A balanced approach is needed to restore trust, protect fairness, and ensure the WTO remains relevant in global trade governance.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the key issues and challenges before the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) and explain what is fundamentally at stake for global trade governance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## Beyond reservation for women in legislative bodies

UPSC Syllabus- GS 1- Issues related to women

### Introduction

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (106th Constitutional Amendment, 2023) provides one-third reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. However, since its implementation depends on a future delimitation exercise and may be delayed until 2034, the focus should not only be on the extent of reservation but also on the quality of representation it ensures.

### What is the historical background of women's reservation in India?

Women's political participation in India has evolved through decades of struggle:

- The discourse on women's reservation began in the **1920s-30s**, during the confluence of the national liberation movement and educational reforms.
- Paradoxically, leaders such as **Sarojini Naidu** and **Muthulakshmi Reddy** initially opposed reservation, fearing it would reinforce perceptions of women's inferiority.
- The **73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993)** was a watershed moment, reserving 33% of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- After multiple introductions and lapses over three decades, the **106th Amendment (2023)** finally extended reservation to Parliament and State Assemblies.

### What are the gains of women's reservation at the grassroots?

- **People-centric governance:** Women Pradhans have often prioritised basic needs like sanitation, housing, education, and electricity-issues that directly affect everyday life.
- **Leadership in crises:** During COVID-19, women representatives in rural Bihar stepped up as first responders, underlining the importance of grassroots leadership.
- **Improved social outcomes:** In West Bengal, their leadership has been linked to better literacy, lower BPL levels, and a higher average age of marriage.
- **Breaking barriers:** In Maharashtra, growing confidence has encouraged many women to contest and win even from unreserved seats, showing real political inclusion.
- **Stronger communities:** Initiatives like **Kudumbashree in Kerala** have further strengthened these gains through self-help group-led community mobilisation.

### What are the challenges and limits of Reservation?

Despite clear gains, the reality on the ground shows that reservation alone cannot solve deeper structural issues:

- **Proxy representation:** In many cases, the '**Sarpanch-Pati**' syndrome turns women representatives into mere figureheads for male relatives. The Nagaur (Rajasthan) incident-where a woman sarpanch was suspended because her husband conducted official meetings-highlights this concern.
- **Political violence and intimidation:** Women, especially from marginalised communities, often face harassment, threats, and even humiliation. The case of Kiran Kumari, a Dalit woman made to touch a councillor's feet during campaigning, reflects how caste and gender hierarchies still persist.

- **Rotation of seats:** Frequent rotation of reserved constituencies disrupts continuity, making it difficult for women to build political careers. Even capable leaders are often denied a second chance - something rarely seen with male politicians.
- **Awareness and literacy gaps:** Limited awareness about roles and responsibilities, along with rural illiteracy, leads to a situation of “inclusion without real participation.”
- **Elite capture:** There is also a risk that reserved seats may end up being controlled by politically influential families, rather than empowering genuine grassroots voices.

### What should be the Way Forward?

To make reservation truly meaningful, a broader and more supportive approach is needed:

- **Increase reservation to 50%:** Since women make up nearly half of India’s population, political representation should reflect this reality.
- **Address political violence:** Strong legal safeguards and effective enforcement are needed to ensure women can participate in politics without fear, including protection from online abuse.
- **Invest in capacity-building:** Regular training programmes can help women representatives better understand governance, finances, and digital tools, enabling more independent decision-making.
- **Expand women’s role in elections:** Greater participation as presiding officers, booth-level officers, and voter registration officials can make the electoral process more inclusive and trustworthy.
- **Reform rotation policy:** A more balanced approach is needed to allow continuity while still preventing the concentration of power.

### Conclusion

Reservation is an important step, but it is only the beginning. The real goal is to ensure that women not only enter politics but also exercise real power and influence. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam should act as a foundation on which genuine participation, voice, and leadership can be built.

**Question for Practice-** Despite one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions since 1993, proxy representation and political violence continue to limit real participation. Examine the structural challenges to women’s political empowerment in India and suggest measures to address them.

Source- [TH](#)

## India’s new climate targets are modest but significant

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure And Environment

### Introduction

India has announced its 2035 climate targets under its nationally determined contributions, focusing on reducing emissions intensity, expanding non-fossil energy, and increasing carbon sinks. These targets show only a small rise over the 2030 goals, which India is already close to achieving ahead of time. However, in a global situation where climate efforts are weakening and energy security concerns are rising, these targets carry strong strategic importance.

### Key Features of India’s 2035 Climate Targets

1. **Higher share of non-fossil electricity capacity:** India aims to achieve **at least 60% non-fossil fuel-based installed electricity capacity by 2035**, increasing from the **50% target set for 2030**.
2. **Improved emissions intensity reduction:** India has set a target of **at least 47% reduction in emissions intensity from 2005 levels**, compared to the **45% target for 2030**.
3. **Expansion of carbon sinks:** India plans to create an additional **3.5 to 4 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent carbon sink** over the levels that existed in **2005**.
4. **Progression under Paris Agreement obligations:** These targets are part of the required update under the **2015 Paris Agreement**, where countries periodically revise their **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)**.
5. **Existing progress on 2030 commitments:** India is already on course to achieve its **2030 targets ahead of time**, with the **renewable energy target already met**, while the other two indicators are likely close to achievement.

### Strategic Significance in a Changing Global Energy Landscape

1. **Reaffirmation of clean energy commitment:** India has reinforced its commitment to a clean energy pathway at a time when countries are reconsidering their energy, economic, and security policies.
2. **Global climate setback due to policy shifts:** The re-election of Donald Trump has led the United States to move away from renewable energy and reinvest in oil and gas resources.
3. **Impact of actions by a major energy player:** As the **world's second largest producer and consumer of energy**, the United States' shift has slowed global climate progress and risks reversing earlier momentum.
4. **Geopolitical tensions and energy insecurity:** Actions related to control over oil and gas resources, including in **Venezuela**, and the **war in West Asia**, have pushed countries to secure fossil fuel supply chains.
5. **India's contrasting position:** As the **world's third biggest emitter and third largest energy consumer**, India has chosen to continue with clean energy and enhanced climate action.
6. **Recognition by international leadership:** The **UN Climate Change Executive Secretary** stated that India's targets are crucial as rising fossil fuel dependence is increasing costs, weakening national security, and affecting access to food and fuel.
7. **Strategic advantage of renewables:** Renewable energy avoids dependence on vulnerable supply routes such as the **Strait of Hormuz**, which faced disruption during the US-Israeli war on Iran.

### Major Constraints to India's Climate Ambition

1. **Gap between potential and committed targets:** The Central Electricity Authority projected **52% to 70% by 2035**, but India committed only **60%**, showing cautious ambition.

2. **Inadequate climate finance commitments:** At **Baku 2024**, only **\$300 billion/year from 2035** was agreed, far below the **\$1.3 trillion demand**.
3. **Direct impact of finance gap on ambition:** Limited funding has forced India to **moderate its targets despite higher capacity**.
4. **Dissatisfaction with global finance outcomes:** India's targets reflect disappointment with **COP29 Baku outcomes**, especially on finance.
5. **Constraint of binding international commitments:** India avoids higher targets to prevent **future policy restrictions**.

#### What should be done

1. **Ensure adequate climate finance availability:** There is a need to increase financial commitments to match the **\$1.3 trillion demand** of developing countries.
2. **Mobilise low-cost and long-term finance:** India has identified securing **affordable, long-term funding** from both domestic and international sources as a core objective.
3. **Continue global engagement on finance issues:** The **two-year work programme on climate finance** should be used to address structural gaps in funding.
4. **Strengthen global climate finance discussions:** At the **United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil**, India pushed for a **two-year work programme** to address climate finance issues.
5. **Maintain balance between ambition and feasibility:** Climate targets should reflect both environmental goals and financial realities to ensure effective implementation.
6. **Strengthen focus on adaptation:** India's 2035 plan is expected to include a **strong emphasis on adaptation actions**, along with mitigation efforts.

#### Conclusion

India's 2035 climate targets are modest in numerical increase but significant in strategic intent. They reflect a balance between ambition and constraints such as limited climate finance and global uncertainty. By continuing its clean energy pathway while avoiding rigid commitments, India signals stability and responsibility. These targets reinforce its role in global climate action despite weakening international cooperation.

#### Question for practice:

Examine how India's 2035 climate targets reflect a balance between modest ambition and strategic commitment in the context of global energy and climate challenges.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

### Corporate Law Reforms

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

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## Introduction

India's corporate regulatory framework is undergoing a shift to match the scale, speed, and complexity of modern business. The **Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** seeks to align company law with evolving needs by simplifying compliance, promoting digital governance, and reducing criminal penalties. It also reflects a structured attempt to improve ease of doing business while maintaining accountability and strengthening corporate governance systems.

## Context and Legislative Background

1. **Introduction and JPC referral:** The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha and referred to a **31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (21 Lok Sabha + 10 Rajya Sabha members)** for detailed scrutiny and recommendations.
2. **Timeline for review:** The JPC will submit its report by the **last day of the first week of the Monsoon Session**.
3. **Legal framework under amendment:** The Bill proposes changes to the **Companies Act, 2013** and the **Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008**.
4. **Basis of reforms:** The amendments address gaps identified by the **Company Law Committee (2022 report)** and aim to streamline regulatory processes.
5. **Objective of reforms:** The focus is on **ease of doing business and ease of living for corporates**, along with rationalisation of penalties and decriminalisation of minor offences.

## Key Provisions of the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026

1. **Expansion of light-touch compliance regime:** The definition of **small companies is broadened**, bringing more growth-stage entities under simplified compliance.
2. **Reduction in compliance penalties:** Caps on additional fees for delayed filings are **lowered and rationalised**, reducing punitive impact and encouraging voluntary compliance.
3. **Relaxation for smaller entities:** Board meeting and disclosure requirements are **eased for small, one-person, and dormant companies**, reducing governance burden.
4. **New financial instruments:** Companies can issue **instruments linked to share capital value**, moving beyond traditional ESOP structures.
5. **Modernisation of buy-back provisions:** Buy-back rules now include **shares from equity incentive schemes**, remove affidavit-based solvency requirements, clarify computation limits, and allow **more than one buy-back in a financial year with safeguards**.
6. **Digital-first corporate framework:** General meetings can be held in **physical, virtual, or hybrid mode**, with at least **one compulsory physical AGM every three years**.
7. **Shareholder participation safeguards:** Shareholders can **requisition hybrid meetings**, ensuring wider participation.

## 9 PM Compilation March 2026

8. **Electronic communication system:** Electronic service of documents and digital communication become the **default for prescribed companies**, reducing logistical burden.
9. **Strengthening director accountability:** Independent directors face **continuous eligibility testing and expanded cooling-off periods across group entities**.
10. **Limiting board authority:** Boards cannot appoint directors who are **rejected by shareholders**, strengthening shareholder control.
11. **Decriminalisation of offences:** Technical and procedural defaults are shifted from **criminal liability to civil monetary penalties**, ensuring predictability.
12. **Additional structural provisions:** The Bill introduces a framework for **conversion of specified trusts (registered under SEBI/IFSC authority) into Limited Liability Partnership (LLPs)**.

### Significance of the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026

1. **Improvement in ease of doing business:** Simplified compliance and streamlined regulation reduce operational burden for companies.
2. **Encouragement of compliance culture:** Lower penalties and rationalised fees promote **voluntary regularisation** and reduce fear of punitive action.
3. **Enhanced financial flexibility:** New instruments and revised buy-back rules improve **capital structuring and executive compensation flexibility**.
4. **Digital governance transformation:** Hybrid meetings and electronic communication increase **efficiency, accessibility, and participation**.
5. **Strengthened corporate governance:** Stricter norms for independent directors improve **accountability and board independence**.
6. **Shift towards risk-based regulation:** Replacing criminal penalties with civil fines ensures **proportionate and predictable enforcement**.

### Concerns and Gaps

1. **Incomplete lifecycle reform:** The Bill focuses more on operations and compliance, but gaps remain in **entry and exit processes for businesses**.
2. **Complex incorporation process:** Incorporation still involves **procedural complexity**, especially for low-risk, resident-owned companies.
3. **Dependence on NCLT processes:** Corporate actions like **capital reduction and intra-group reorganisations** still rely on NCLT, causing delays.
4. **Lack of fast-track mechanisms:** There is limited availability of **threshold-based safe harbours and administrative routes** for low-risk transactions.

5. **Digital compliance challenges:** Digital systems require strong safeguards for **data integrity, proof of delivery, and member choice**, which need careful implementation.
6. **Debate on CSR provisions:** Opposition raised concerns about dilution of the **mandatory 2% CSR contribution**, but the government clarified that only the **profitability threshold** is being changed, not the CSR requirement.
7. **Institutional debate on scrutiny mechanism:** Some members questioned the need for a JPC instead of using the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Corporate Affairs**, indicating procedural concerns.

### Way Forward

1. **Simplifying incorporation:** Adoption of **straight-through processing, Aadhaar-based DIN/DSC issuance, and reduced documentation** can ease entry barriers.
2. **Reducing reliance on NCLT:** Fast-track administrative mechanisms should replace **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) processes for low-risk and consent-based cases**.
3. **Introducing safe harbour provisions:** Threshold-based frameworks can simplify **capital reduction and intra-group restructuring**.
4. **Strengthening digital safeguards:** Digital systems must ensure **secure communication, transparency, and inclusive participation**.

### Conclusion

The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 reflects a clear move towards **simplified compliance, digital processes, and decriminalisation of minor offences**. It improves flexibility and governance standards. However, further reforms are needed in incorporation and exit processes. A balanced, risk-based framework can ensure efficient business operations while maintaining strong regulatory oversight and accountability.

### Question for practice:

**Evaluate** the key provisions, significance, and limitations of the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in reforming India's corporate regulatory framework.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

### Menstrual leave policy must be nuanced, inclusive

Source: The post "**Menstrual leave policy must be nuanced, inclusive**" has been created, based on "**Menstrual leave policy must be nuanced, inclusive**" published in "**Indian express**" on 28th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2-Governance

**Context:** Menstruation is not merely a routine biological process but a significant physiological event that often causes severe pain, fatigue, heavy bleeding, gastrointestinal distress, and hormonal mood disturbances. Many women experience dysmenorrhea and menorrhagia, which can severely affect their physical comfort and

workplace productivity. The Supreme Court in the case of *Dr Jaya Thakur v. Government of India & Ors.* recognised that lack of menstrual dignity violates **Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity)** and **Article 21A (Right to Education)**. Therefore, India requires a nuanced and inclusive menstrual leave policy that recognises menstrual health as part of constitutional equality and dignity.

## Need for a Menstrual Leave Policy in India

### 1. Physiological realities demand accommodation

- a. Menstruation involves uterine contractions powered by prostaglandins, which are the same biochemical agents that induce labour during childbirth.
- b. Many women experience dysmenorrhea that has been compared to the early stages of a heart attack in intensity.
- c. Conditions such as menorrhagia often lead to anaemia and severe fatigue among menstruating individuals.
- d. Hormonal fluctuations during menstruation also cause gastrointestinal distress and mood disturbances that affect daily functioning.
- e. Therefore, workplace accommodation becomes necessary to support menstrual health and productivity.

### 2. Addressing stigma and silence

- a. In India, menstruation continues to be treated as polluting and impure in many social contexts.
- b. Many adolescent girls drop out of school due to lack of dignified sanitation infrastructure during menstruation.
- c. Workplace environments often remain silent about menstrual distress, forcing women to depend on sick leave instead of structured menstrual leave.
- d. A formal menstrual leave policy would help normalise menstruation as a legitimate health concern rather than a private inconvenience.

### 3. Constitutional backing for menstrual dignity

- a. The Supreme Court held that forcing girls to remain without access to sanitary pads, clean toilets, and safe environments during menstruation violates their right to dignity under Article 21.
- b. The Court also observed that lack of menstrual facilities forces girls to stay at home and violates their right to education under Article 21A.
- c. The judgment clarified that treating everyone the same without recognising biological differences does not amount to true equality.
- d. The Court emphasised that human dignity cannot be fragmented and must be protected in all circumstances.

## Concerns Raised Against Menstrual Leave Policy

### 1. Fear of reduced employability

- a. Opponents of menstrual leave policies argue that such provisions may discourage employers from hiring women.

- b. Similar arguments were historically made against the introduction of paid sick leave and maternity leave policies.
- c. However, experience shows that institutionalising care through such policies strengthens workforce participation rather than weakening it.

## 2. Risk of reinforcing gender bias

- a. Some policymakers argue that menstrual leave policies may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes about women's biological limitations.
- b. A bench headed by the Chief Justice of India expressed concern that demanding menstrual leave may lead employers to avoid hiring women.
- c. Therefore, menstrual leave policies must be carefully designed to balance protection with equality in employment opportunities.

## Why Policy Must Be Nuanced and Inclusive

### 1. Infrastructure support

- a. A menstrual leave policy should include access to hygienic toilets in schools and workplaces.
- b. It should also ensure the availability of free sanitary pads, especially for vulnerable groups.
- c. Proper disposal mechanisms must be provided to maintain dignity and hygiene during menstruation.

### 2. Awareness and destigmatisation

- a. Awareness campaigns must be conducted to remove social stigma associated with menstruation.
- b. Public discussion and institutional recognition can help normalise menstrual health concerns.
- c. Such awareness initiatives will encourage workplaces and educational institutions to become more supportive environments.

### 3. Coverage of marginalised groups

- a. The Maharashtra State Commission for Women convened consultations involving activists, medical professionals, and labour representatives to discuss menstrual leave policy.
- b. The consultations emphasised the need to extend protections to unorganised-sector workers who currently lack formal workplace benefits.
- c. The panel also highlighted the importance of including trans and non-binary individuals who menstruate within the policy framework.
- d. Such inclusion would ensure that menstrual leave policy reflects substantive equality rather than limited workplace privilege.

## Evidence Supporting Gender-Sensitive Policies

- a. A study conducted by Verma, Bhal, and Vrat in 2013 among call-centre employees in Delhi found that gender-sensitive workplace policies improve job satisfaction.
- b. The study also found that such policies reduce stress among employees.
- c. Gender-sensitive policies strengthen employee loyalty and contribute to long-term workforce stability.
- d. Therefore, menstrual leave policies can strengthen workforce participation instead of weakening it.

## Way Forward

1. India should introduce a menstrual leave policy that goes beyond leave provisions and addresses the broader menstrual health ecosystem.
2. The policy should include access to sanitation infrastructure and free menstrual hygiene products.
3. Workplace flexibility arrangements should be encouraged to accommodate menstrual health needs.
4. The policy framework should include workers in the unorganised sector to ensure equitable coverage.
5. Awareness campaigns must be integrated into policy implementation to dismantle stigma surrounding menstruation.
6. Inclusive policy language should recognise the needs of all menstruating individuals, including trans and non-binary persons.

**Conclusion:** A menstrual leave policy should be recognised as a constitutional necessity linked to dignity, equality, and health rights rather than merely a welfare measure. Similar to maternity leave provisions, menstrual leave can help normalise the reality that women are long-term contributors to the workforce who sometimes require temporary biological accommodation. Therefore, a nuanced and inclusive menstrual leave policy can strengthen both social justice and workforce participation in India.

**Question:** Menstrual leave policy in India must move beyond leave entitlement to a broader menstrual health ecosystem grounded in dignity, equality and inclusivity." Discuss.

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

## India's foreign policy is being shaped by financial constraints

**Source:** The post "India's foreign policy is being shaped by financial constraints" has been created, based on "India's foreign policy is being shaped by financial constraints" published in "Indian express" on 28th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2-International Relations

**Context:** India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by the principles of strategic autonomy and neutrality in global conflicts. However, recent tensions between U. S. A, Israel, and Iran exposed the economic and security constraints shaping India's diplomatic choices. Although India maintained a formal position of neutrality by calling for de-escalation and emphasising maritime security and diaspora protection, underlying economic indicators suggest a temporary tilt toward the US-Israel axis. This shift reflects structural vulnerabilities arising from India's dependence on external trade, energy imports, financial markets, and defence partnerships.

## India's Foreign Policy Response During the Crisis

1. India officially called for de-escalation of tensions and emphasised the importance of maritime security in the region.
2. India also prioritised the safety of its large diaspora population living in Gulf countries.
3. However, high-frequency indicators such as oil import patterns and shipping costs suggested a temporary strategic adjustment toward the US-Israel axis.
4. This adjustment reflected economic necessity rather than a permanent shift in strategic preference.

## Structural Economic Constraints Shaping India's Foreign Policy

### 1. Dependence on crude oil imports

- a. Since 2022, Russia had emerged as India's dominant crude oil supplier, accounting for nearly 35–40 per cent of imports due to discounted prices.
- b. By January 2026, Russian crude imports declined to around 21 per cent as India diversified imports toward the U.S.A and Saudi Arabia.
- c. Indian refiners accepted higher import costs from alternative suppliers, indicating geopolitical signalling rather than price optimisation.
- d. However, after a temporary US waiver permitting Russian cargo already in transit, India quickly increased Russian crude purchases again.
- e. This pattern shows that India's choices were shaped by structural compulsions rather than strategic preference.

### 2. Trade exposure to the U.S.A

- a. Nearly one-fifth of India's exports are directed toward the U.S.A market.
- b. Several key export sectors in India remain deeply dependent on American demand.
- c. Therefore, the threat of tariffs or trade restrictions from the U.S.A carries serious macroeconomic implications for India.
- d. This trade exposure limits India's ability to diverge significantly from US policy positions.

### 3. Dependence on the dollar-centric global financial system

- a. India's macroeconomic stability remains closely linked to the dollar-dominated international financial system.
- b. Oil price shocks widen the current account deficit and increase pressure on the rupee.
- c. Divergence from US geopolitical positions may trigger capital outflows as investors reassess risks in emerging markets.
- d. During the crisis period, portfolio outflows of approximately \$6–8 billion intensified pressure on India's external balance.

### 4. Defence and technology dependencies

- a. Although Russia continues to remain an important defence supplier, India's dependence on advanced military technologies has increasingly shifted toward the US-Israel axis.
- b. Critical defence capabilities such as drones and jet engine technologies are increasingly sourced from Western partners.
- c. This growing technological dependence limits India's strategic flexibility in geopolitical conflicts.

### 5. Dependence on Gulf diaspora and remittances

- a. Millions of Indian workers reside in Gulf countries and contribute significantly through remittances.
- b. These remittance flows amount to tens of billions of dollars annually and support India's macroeconomic stability.
- c. Since regional security architecture in the Gulf remains anchored to the U.S.A, India cannot sustain a confrontational posture toward that system.

## Domestic Economic Impact of External Geopolitical Shocks

### 1. Rising energy vulnerability

- a. India depends on imports for nearly 85–87 per cent of its crude oil requirements and around 50 per cent of its LNG needs.
- b. India also depends on imports for nearly 60 per cent of its LPG consumption.
- c. Disruptions in supply chains therefore quickly transmit global shocks into the domestic economy.

### 2. Inflationary pressures and currency depreciation

- a. The Indian crude oil basket rose to ₹156.29 per barrel in mid-March 2026.
- b. During the same period, the rupee depreciated to ₹92.63 per dollar.
- c. The Reserve Bank of India deployed nearly \$20 billion from foreign exchange reserves to stabilise the currency.
- d. Rising energy import costs contributed to inflationary pressures and widening external imbalances.

### 3. Transmission through financial markets

- a. Higher oil prices widened the current account deficit and weakened investor confidence.
- b. Capital outflows further intensified currency depreciation pressures.
- c. This created a reinforcing cycle of inflation, fiscal stress, and financial instability.

### Strategic Costs of the Temporary Policy Tilt

1. India's temporary alignment toward the US-Israel axis exposed its shipping and energy supply chains to risks from disruptions linked to Iran-related tensions in the Strait of Hormuz.
2. External shocks quickly translated into domestic price increases, particularly in LPG and natural gas.
3. LPG prices increased by ₹60 per cylinder in March 2026, reflecting global volatility.
4. Therefore, the short-term stabilising tilt reduced India's diplomatic flexibility while increasing energy vulnerability.

### Way Forward

1. India should diversify its crude oil import basket further to reduce geopolitical exposure to any single supplier.
2. India should accelerate renewable energy expansion to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.
3. India should strengthen alternative financial arrangements to reduce vulnerability to dollar-centric shocks.
4. India should deepen defence indigenisation under strategic autonomy frameworks.
5. India should continue balancing relations with major powers while protecting diaspora interests in West Asia.

**Conclusion:** India's response to recent West Asian tensions demonstrates that foreign policy autonomy is increasingly shaped by structural economic, financial, and energy dependencies. Although India maintained formal neutrality, its operational choices reflected constraints arising from trade exposure, defence partnerships, financial markets, and diaspora security concerns. Therefore, strengthening economic resilience and reducing external vulnerabilities remains essential for preserving India's strategic autonomy in the evolving global order.

**Question:** India's foreign policy autonomy is increasingly shaped by structural economic and financial constraints in a dollar-centric global order." Discuss in the context of recent geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

**Source:** [Indian Express](#)

## Special Economic Zones (SEZs) – Significance and Challenges

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

### Introduction

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are **duty-free enclaves treated as outside the customs territory** for authorised operations. They support manufacturing, services, and warehousing through Free Trade Warehousing Zones. Their core aim is to **boost exports, attract investment, create jobs, and build infrastructure**. In India, SEZs have expanded economic activity and improved competitiveness, but policy and structural challenges still affect their full performance.

### Evolution and Policy Framework of SEZs in India

1. **EPZ phase and early limitations:** India established Asia's first **Export Processing Zone (EPZ)** at **Kandla in 1965**, but it faced issues like procedural delays, weak infrastructure, and unstable fiscal regime.
2. **Introduction of SEZ Policy (April 2000):** The policy aimed to create **world-class infrastructure, better fiscal incentives, and simplified regulation** to attract investment.
3. **Operation under Foreign Trade Policy:** SEZs operated under the **Foreign Trade Policy from November 2000 to February 2006**, with incentives given through statutory provisions.
4. **Legal framework through SEZ Act and Rules:** The **SEZ Act, 2005 and SEZ Rules, 2006 (effective 10 February 2006)** introduced single-window clearance and a stable policy framework.
5. **Core objectives under the Act:** The Act focuses on **economic activity, employment, and infrastructure development**, along with environmental compliance.
6. **Monitoring mechanism:** Performance is tracked through **monthly reports submitted by Development Commissioners**.
7. **Recent amendments in June 2025:** Rules were modified to allow **SEZs for semiconductor and electronic component manufacturing**, including relaxed land norms and NFE calculation changes.
8. **New SEZs for high-tech manufacturing:** Two SEZs were notified in **June 2025 at Sanand (Gujarat) and Dharwad (Karnataka)** for semiconductors and electronics.

### Performance and Significance of SEZs in India's Economy

1. **Scale of SEZ network:** India has **368 notified SEZs as of 28 February 2026**, showing wide expansion.

2. **Export performance and growth:** Exports reached ₹11.70 lakh crore (2025–26 till December 2025) with 32.02% growth over the previous year.
3. **Employment generation:** SEZs employed over 31.73 lakh people (December 2025), showing strong job creation.
4. **Investment inflows:** Total investment stood at ₹7.86 lakh crore (December 2025), indicating investor confidence.
5. **Industrial and ecosystem development:** SEZs created specialised industrial clusters, new business ecosystems, and supported innovation.
6. **Local economic impact:** They improved socio-economic outcomes through infrastructure and employment.
7. **Global integration and competitiveness:** SEZs strengthened India's participation in global value chains and improved its global investment position.

### India's Policy Support and Incentives

1. **Duty-free and tax incentives:** Units get duty-free import and domestic procurement, and supplies to SEZs are zero-rated under IGST Act, 2017.
2. **Exemptions and state support:** Exemptions from Central Sales Tax, Service Tax, and State sales tax, along with additional state-level benefits.
3. **Single-window clearance system:** Approvals are provided through a single-window mechanism for Central and State levels.
4. **Union Budget 2026–27 focus:** The Budget emphasised exports as drivers of employment, foreign exchange, and global integration.
5. **Definition and treatment of DTA: Domestic Tariff Area (DTA)** includes the whole of India except SEZs, and SEZ-to-DTA supply is treated as imports under Section 30 of SEZ Act, 2005, while DTA-to-SEZ supply is treated as exports under Section 2(m).
6. **One-time concessional DTA sales:** SEZ units can sell a prescribed proportion of output in DTA at concessional duty, limited to their export share.
7. **Purpose of DTA reform:** This aims to improve capacity utilisation, economies of scale, reduce export costs, and enhance resilience.
8. **Support for technology sectors:** Extension of incentives for cloud and data-centre operations to attract global firms.

### Key Challenges in SEZ Policy

1. **Uneven fiscal incentives across states:** Stamp duty and other benefits are not uniformly implemented, reducing their impact.

2. **Land-related issues and infrastructure gaps:** There is **no earmarking of land and lack of initial infrastructure**, creating barriers.
3. **Long gestation and delays:** The approval process is slow, making land unusable for long periods.
4. **Weak single-window system:** The single-window clearance is often ineffective in practice.
5. **Absence of exit policy:** There is **no clear exit mechanism for SEZ developers**, which increases financial risk and uncertainty.
6. **Over-emphasis on export orientation:** Policy limits flexibility by focusing mainly on exports.
7. **Complex approval structure:** The **two-stage approval process** is seen as unnecessary.
8. **Excess number of SEZs:** There are **too many SEZs**, reducing efficiency and effectiveness.
9. **Issues in land acquisition:** Poor land records in many states create major acquisition challenges.
10. **Policy design limitations:** The SEZ policy was introduced without addressing key problems in **factor markets like land, labour, and capital**, which reduced its effectiveness.

#### Way forward

1. **Government-led land identification:** The Government should **earmark specific sites and invite applications only for them** to reduce rejections.
2. **Focus on larger multi-product SEZs:** Increasing SEZ size will support **multi-product zones**, requiring contiguous land.
3. **Improvement in land records:** Better land records will reduce acquisition disputes and delays.
4. **Strengthening Centre-State coordination:** States should take greater responsibility in **infrastructure development**, similar to VAT implementation success.
5. **Addressing connectivity issues:** Better connectivity can improve performance of **hinterland SEZs**, not just coastal ones.
6. **Reducing unnecessary approvals:** Simplifying the approval process will improve efficiency.
7. **Maintaining state interest post-GST:** With tax incentives reducing after GST, states should be engaged through **infrastructure roles**.

#### Conclusion

SEZs play a major role in exports, investment, and employment. Their strong data shows their economic importance. However, issues like land constraints, policy gaps, and excessive numbers reduce their efficiency. With better land planning, stronger coordination, and focused reforms, SEZs can become more effective drivers of industrial growth and global trade integration in India.

### Question for practice:

Examine the significance, performance, policy framework, and key challenges of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India. Hi

Source: [PIB](#)

## PN3, amidst fragile capital flows

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

### Introduction

The Union government has eased rules under Press Note 3 (PN3) to improve FDI inflows from land-border countries. This shift comes at a time when **net FDI inflows have sharply declined** despite strong gross inflows. The move also reflects improving India–China relations and aims to attract long-term investment, technology, and integration into global supply chains amid growing concerns over fragile capital flows.

### PN3 and Its Strategic Background

1. **Origin and regulatory change:** Press Note 3 (PN3) was issued on April 17, 2020 by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to regulate investments from land-border countries.
2. **Earlier investment rules:** Before PN3, only citizens of Bangladesh and Pakistan required government approval, while others could invest under existing routes.
3. **Expansion of restrictions:** PN3 extended government route approval to all land-border countries and also to cases where the beneficial owner belonged to such countries.
4. **Target and intent:** The restriction mainly targeted China, which had strong investment capacity, to prevent strategic risks.
5. **Geopolitical trigger:** The move followed tensions in Ladakh and the Galwan Valley clash, which led to a freeze in India–China relations.

### Recent Policy Changes and Their Nature

1. **Relaxation in beneficial ownership:** Investors from land-border countries can now invest under the automatic route if **non-controlling beneficial ownership is up to 10 percent**.
2. **Faster approval mechanism:** Investment proposals in key manufacturing sectors will be cleared within **60 days**, ensuring quicker processing.
3. **Sectoral focus:** The policy targets sectors like **capital goods, electronic components, polysilicon, and ingot-wafer**, indicating priority areas.
4. **Signal towards China:** The selected sectors and easing of rules suggest a **calibrated opening towards Chinese investors**.

5. **Ease of doing business:** The changes aim to provide **clarity, faster approvals, and better investment conditions** for foreign investors.

#### Drivers Behind the Policy Shift

1. **Declining net FDI inflows:** Net FDI has fallen sharply from **above 40 billion dollars before the pandemic to below 1 billion dollars in 2024–25**.
2. **Recent improvement but continued concern:** Net FDI increased to about **4 billion dollars in the current fiscal**, but remains low.
3. **Stable gross inflows but high outflows:** Gross inflows remain strong at **70 to 80 billion dollars annually**, but high outflows reduce net gains.
4. **Geopolitical improvement:** India–China relations have improved, especially after the Prime Minister's visit to Tianjin in 2025.
5. **Strategic economic goals:** The policy aims to increase **technology access, domestic value addition, and integration with global supply chains**.

#### Core Challenge

1. **High disinvestment levels:** Foreign investors withdrew **51.5 billion dollars in 2024–25**, compared to 27 billion in 2020–21 and 11 billion in 2015–16.
2. **Rising share of disinvestment:** Disinvestment reached **64 percent of gross FDI inflows**, much higher than the pre-pandemic level of 25 percent.
3. **FDI becoming unstable:** FDI is expected to be long-term, but rising exits show it is becoming **footloose capital**.
4. **Surge in outward FDI:** Outward FDI increased from **11 billion dollars in 2020–21 to over 28 billion dollars in 2024–25**.
5. **Continued rise in current year:** In the first nine months of 2025–26, outward FDI reached **about 26 billion dollars**, higher than the previous year.
6. **Contradictory investment pattern:** Despite strong economic growth, Indian firms are investing more abroad than at home.
7. **Strong corporate performance:** Profits of India Inc grew **three times faster than GDP between 2020 and 2025**, indicating strong financial capacity.
8. **Weak private investment:** Private sector share in investment fell from **37 percent to 31 percent in 2024–25**.
9. **Government-led investment:** Public capital spending has remained above **4 percent of GDP**, compensating for weak private investment.

10. **Emerging paradox:** Domestic firms are moving capital out, while the government is attracting foreign investors through policy changes and trade agreements.

### Conclusion

The easing of PN3 reflects a response to weakening net FDI and improving geopolitical ties. However, **rising disinvestment, increasing outward FDI, and weak private investment highlight fragile capital flows**. The situation shows a clear imbalance where domestic capital is moving out while foreign investment is being encouraged, pointing to deeper concerns in the investment environment.

### Question for practice:

Discuss the recent changes in India's FDI policy under PN3 and analyse the challenges posed by fragile capital flows, including declining net FDI, rising disinvestment, and increasing outward FDI.

Source: [Businessline](#)

### How to secure India's supply chains

Source: The post "**How to secure India's supply chains**" has been created, based on "**How to secure India's supply chains**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 30th March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Economy

**Context:** India's manufacturing ecosystem is deeply integrated into global supply chains, particularly in sectors such as energy, fertilizers, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and critical minerals. While global integration enhances competitiveness and export opportunities, recent geopolitical disruptions have exposed India's structural vulnerabilities due to high dependence on imported raw materials and intermediates. Therefore, strengthening supply-chain resilience has become essential for ensuring economic stability, inflation control, and long-term strategic autonomy.

### Major Supply Chain Vulnerabilities in India

#### 1. Energy Dependence

- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirements and more than 50% of its natural gas consumption, making it highly vulnerable to global geopolitical disruptions.
- A \$10 per barrel increase in crude oil prices increases India's import bill by approximately \$13-14 billion.
- Rising crude prices also increase inflation by nearly 30-40 basis points through higher transport and fertilizer costs.
- Energy price shocks reduce India's GDP growth by nearly 0.2-0.3 percentage points due to rising production and logistics costs across sectors.

#### 2. Food and Fertilizer Dependence

- India remains heavily dependent on imports of edible oils despite being a major agricultural producer.
- India also imports significant quantities of pulses to meet domestic demand, which increases vulnerability to global supply disruptions.

- c. The country depends heavily on imports of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers, which directly affect agricultural productivity and rural incomes during global shocks.
- d. Supply disruptions in these sectors can lead to food inflation and threaten overall macroeconomic stability.

### 3. Manufacturing Input Vulnerability

- a. India's total imports account for nearly 19% of GDP, indicating significant dependence on external supply chains.
- b. Raw materials constitute nearly 34% of imports, intermediates account for 31%, and capital goods account for about 24% of imports.
- c. India imports nearly 65–70% of its pharmaceutical intermediates from China despite being a global leader in generic drug exports.
- d. The country also depends heavily on imports of semiconductors, display panels, and high-end industrial machinery from East Asia.
- e. Disruptions in these critical intermediate inputs can halt manufacturing production across several strategic sectors.

### 4. Critical Minerals Exposure

- a. India depends heavily on imports of critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper, and rare earth elements.
- b. These minerals are essential for emerging sectors such as electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies, and advanced electronics manufacturing.
- c. Global supply of these minerals remains concentrated in a few countries, which increases India's strategic vulnerability during geopolitical conflicts.

## Strategies to Strengthen Supply Chain Resilience

### 1. Energy Security Measures

- a. India must accelerate renewable energy deployment to achieve its target of 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.
- b. Investments in battery storage infrastructure are essential to address intermittency challenges associated with renewable energy sources.
- c. The **National Green Hydrogen Mission** provides an opportunity to reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels in hard-to-abate industrial sectors.
- d. India must also expand domestic oil and gas exploration activities to strengthen long-term energy security.
- e. Expansion of strategic petroleum reserves will help India manage temporary global supply disruptions more effectively.

### 2. Strengthening Agricultural Self-Reliance

- a. The government must expand oilseed production through targeted missions and region-specific crop diversification strategies.
- b. Assured procurement and price support mechanisms must be strengthened to increase domestic pulses production.

- c. Strategic reserves of edible oils and pulses must be created to address supply shocks during emergencies.
- d. Domestic production of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers must be increased to reduce import dependence.
- e. Promotion of bio-fertilizers can provide sustainable alternatives to imported chemical fertilizers.

### 3. Deepening Domestic Manufacturing Ecosystems

- a. India must shift its manufacturing strategy from assembly-led growth toward ecosystem-based domestic value addition.
- b. Policy incentives should prioritize domestic production of APIs, semiconductors, and electronic components.
- c. Strengthening domestic industrial machinery manufacturing will improve India's technological competitiveness.
- d. Adoption of input-efficient technologies and alternative materials can gradually reduce import dependence in manufacturing.

### 4. Strategic Diversification of Imports

- a. India must diversify its sources of imports through long-term supply agreements with resource-rich countries.
- b. Strategic partnerships with regions such as Africa and Latin America can reduce dependence on limited supplier countries.
- c. Diversification of import sources enhances resilience against geopolitical disruptions in global supply chains.

### 5. Building Strategic Reserves

- a. India must expand strategic reserves of petroleum to protect the economy from short-term supply disruptions.
- b. Strategic reserves of edible oils and pulses can help stabilize domestic prices during global shortages.
- c. Creating buffer stocks of fertilizers will support agricultural stability during external supply shocks.

### 6. Industry-Government Coordination

- a. Supply-chain resilience requires coordinated action between government institutions, industry stakeholders, and global partners.
- b. Industry bodies such as **Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry** play an important role in policy consultation and implementation support.
- c. A collaborative institutional framework will help India build long-term resilience against future supply-chain disruptions.

**Conclusion:** India's aspiration to become a global manufacturing hub requires reducing structural dependence on imports in critical sectors such as energy, fertilizers, intermediates, and strategic minerals. A comprehensive strategy based on domestic capacity building, diversification of supply sources, technological innovation, and creation of strategic reserves will strengthen India's economic resilience and ensure sustainable long-term growth.

**Question:** India's integration with global supply chains has increased both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Discuss the major supply-chain risks faced by India and suggest an integrated strategy to strengthen supply-chain resilience.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### Neighbours first: On India-Nepal ties

**Source:** The post "Neighbours first: On India-Nepal ties" has been created, based on "Neighbours first: On India-Nepal ties" published in "The Hindu" on 30th March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2- International Relations

**Context:** India and Nepal share a unique civilisational relationship based on open borders, deep cultural ties, economic interdependence, and strong people-to-people connections. The appointment of Nepal's new Prime Minister **Balendra Shah** provides an opportunity for both countries to reset relations and strengthen cooperation under India's "Neighbourhood First" policy. However, evolving domestic political dynamics in Nepal and past bilateral tensions require a cautious and forward-looking diplomatic engagement strategy.

### Significance of India-Nepal Relations

#### 1. Civilisational and Cultural Linkages

- a. India and Nepal share centuries-old cultural, religious, and linguistic ties reinforced through shared traditions such as pilgrimage circuits and intermarriage across borders.
- b. The open-border arrangement between the two countries allows unrestricted movement of people, strengthening familial and economic linkages.

#### 2. Economic Interdependence

- a. Nepal is a landlocked country and depends heavily on India for trade transit routes and access to global markets.
- b. India remains Nepal's largest trading partner and a major source of investment and development assistance.
- c. Regional energy cooperation through cross-border electricity trade provides Nepal with opportunities to export hydropower and earn revenue.

#### 3. Strategic Importance

- a. Nepal occupies a critical geopolitical position between India and China, making it strategically significant for India's regional security interests.
- b. Stable India-Nepal relations are essential for maintaining security along India's northern borders.

### Emerging Political Changes in Nepal and Their Implication

#### 1. Rise of New Political Leadership

- a. The election of **Balendra Shah**, Nepal's first Madhesi Prime Minister at a relatively young age, reflects a shift away from the traditional dominance of the Pahadi political elite.

- b. This change represents the emergence of a new generation of leadership that is less influenced by historical political alignments with India.

## 2. Influence of Gen-Z Political Mobilisation

- a. The political transition in Nepal following the fall of the government of **K. P. Sharma Oli** reflects the rise of youth-led political mobilisation demanding governance reforms and national assertion.
- b. This evolving political landscape requires India to engage with new stakeholders rather than relying on legacy political relationships.

## 3. Uncertain Foreign Policy Orientation

- a. The foreign policy priorities of the new Nepali leadership regarding relations with India, China, and the United States are still evolving.
- b. Therefore, India must adopt a flexible diplomatic approach while engaging with Nepal's emerging political leadership.

## Challenges in India–Nepal Relations

### 1. Legacy Political Distrust

- a. India–Nepal relations experienced strain in the past decade due to disagreements related to Nepal's constitution-making process and cross-border trade disruptions.
- b. Perceptions of interference in Nepal's domestic affairs have occasionally generated nationalist sentiments within Nepal.

### 2. Territorial Issues

- a. Differences over boundary-related matters have periodically created diplomatic tensions between the two countries.
- b. The publication of maps reflecting the idea of “Greater Nepal” by some political actors has raised concerns in India.

### 3. Strategic Competition in the Region

- a. Nepal's increasing engagement with China has introduced new geopolitical complexities into India–Nepal relations.
- b. Infrastructure cooperation between Nepal and external partners requires careful diplomatic management by India.

### 4. Pending Institutional Issues

- a. Nepal has requested revisions to the **India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950)**, which remains a sensitive issue in bilateral relations.
- b. Restrictions on overflight permissions and electricity trade involving third-country investments have also affected bilateral cooperation.

## Opportunities for Strengthening India–Nepal Relations

### 1. Energy Cooperation

- a. India's regional energy grid initiatives can help Nepal export surplus hydropower and strengthen economic integration between the two countries.
- b. Facilitating electricity trade will contribute to Nepal's economic growth and regional energy security.

### 2. Support During External Economic Shocks

- a. Nepal remains vulnerable to disruptions in fuel and fertilizer imports due to global geopolitical conflicts.
- b. India can play a supportive role by ensuring stable supply chains for essential commodities.

### 3. Facilitating Aviation and Connectivity

- a. Granting overflight permissions for new Nepali international airports can strengthen regional connectivity and tourism growth.
- b. Improved connectivity will enhance trade and people-to-people exchanges.

### 4. Strengthening Development Partnership

- a. India's development assistance in infrastructure, health, education, and connectivity sectors can reinforce long-term trust between the two countries.
- b. Expanding cooperation in border infrastructure and digital connectivity can deepen bilateral engagement.

### 5. High-Level Political Engagement

- a. Early diplomatic outreach by inviting **Balendra Shah** to India would signal India's commitment to strengthening neighbourhood relations.
- b. Regular high-level visits help maintain political trust and strategic clarity between the two governments.

### Way Forward

**1. Adopt a Sensitive Diplomatic Approach:** India must engage Nepal with respect for its sovereignty while acknowledging changing domestic political dynamics.

**2. Update Bilateral Institutional Frameworks:** Revisiting the **India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950)** can help address long-standing concerns and modernise bilateral cooperation.

**3. Expand Economic and Energy Integration:** Strengthening cross-border electricity trade and infrastructure connectivity can transform bilateral relations into a mutually beneficial economic partnership.

**4. Strengthen the Neighbourhood First Policy:** Prioritising Nepal within India's neighbourhood diplomacy framework will reinforce trust and stability in South Asia.

**Conclusion:** India and Nepal share a unique relationship shaped by geography, history, and culture, but evolving political dynamics in Nepal require renewed diplomatic engagement. A strategy based on mutual sensitivity, institutional reforms, connectivity expansion, and high-level political outreach can help both countries build a stable and future-oriented partnership under the “Neighbourhood First” approach.

**Question:** India–Nepal relations are rooted in geography, culture and economic interdependence, yet they face periodic political challenges. In the context of Nepal’s new leadership, examine the opportunities and challenges in India–Nepal relations and suggest the way forward for strengthening bilateral ties.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

## Environmental Impact of the War

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Environment

### Introduction

Conflicts create large environmental damage through emissions, pollution, and weak governance. The **first 14 days of the US-Israel war on Iran emitted over 5 million tonnes of greenhouse gases, exceeding 84 countries combined**. Militaries are major polluters, and their activities release toxins, damage ecosystems, and weaken environmental systems. These impacts continue before, during, and after conflicts, affecting climate, resources, and human survival.

### Pre Conflict Phase Militarisation and Environmental Degradation

- 1. High Resource Consumption and Emissions:** Militaries use large amounts of metals, minerals, water, and hydrocarbons. They contribute around 5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and their emissions often exceed those of many countries.
- 2. Energy Intensive Military Systems:** Military vehicles, aircraft, and infrastructure depend on oil with low efficiency. Continuous training and readiness further increase emissions and resource use.
- 3. Large Land Use and Ecological Impact:** Military lands cover 1–6% of global land surface, often in sensitive ecosystems. Training and testing damage habitats and create chemical and noise pollution.
- 4. Weapon Production and Disposal Pollution:** Disposal of weapons through burning, detonation, or sea dumping causes long-term pollution. Even conventional weapons create environmental risks.
- 5. Legacy Pollution and Emerging Risks:** Weak oversight has created long-term pollution, including **Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)** contamination. Overseas bases often face reduced environmental regulation.
- 6. Diversion from Sustainable Development:** High military spending reduces investment in environmental protection. It also weakens global cooperation on climate issues and resource management.

### Environmental Impact During Conflict Direct and Indirect Damage

## 9 PM Compilation March 2026

- 1. Massive Emissions and Fuel Use:** High intensity conflicts consume large fuel volumes and increase emissions. The Russia–Ukraine war produced 230 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e in three years, showing the scale of impact.
- 2. Destruction of Land and Urban Areas:** Explosions and heavy vehicle movement damage landscapes, while urban warfare creates debris that causes air and soil pollution, worsening environmental quality.
- 3. Damage to Industrial and Energy Infrastructure:** Attacks on oil, nuclear, and industrial facilities release toxic pollutants and cause long-term environmental damage. In the **2026 US–Israel strikes on Iran**, oil depots and refineries were hit, releasing large clouds of toxic smoke and causing “**black rain.**” This led to **breathing problems, soil and water contamination, and air pollution spreading to neighbouring regions.**
- 4. Severe Pollution from Scorched Earth Tactics:** Burning crops and destroying water systems harm food security and livelihoods. These actions create long-term environmental damage.
- 5. Toxic Weapons and Hazardous Materials:** Weapons like depleted uranium and white phosphorus cause toxic and radioactive pollution. Chemical defoliants have caused long-term ecological damage.
- 6. Environmental Legacy of Military Waste:** Landmines and munitions pollute soil and water. Military scrap releases harmful materials and creates health risks.
- 7. Biodiversity Loss and Wildlife Crime:** Weak governance increases poaching and illegal hunting. Conservation efforts weaken, and protected areas lose protection.
- 8. Deforestation and Conflict Driven Resource Exploitation:** Conflict increases dependence on wood and natural resources for survival, leading to overuse and deforestation. At the same time, armed groups control oil, minerals, and timber, and use practices like mercury-based mining, which pollute water bodies and deepen environmental degradation.
- 9. Human Displacement and Environmental Pressure:** Refugee camps strain water, forests, and sanitation systems. Many camps are located in Key Biodiversity Areas.
- 10. Urban Pressure and Waste Mismanagement:** Migration increases pressure on infrastructure, and system breakdown leads to dumping and burning, increasing pollution.
- 11. Breakdown of Environmental Governance:** Laws and monitoring systems collapse during conflict. This allows uncontrolled pollution and weakens environmental protection.
- 12. Reduced International Cooperation:** Conflicts disrupt global environmental programmes and weaken coordination, as countries struggle to meet obligations under frameworks like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Military emissions reporting remains poor under the UNFCCC, showing that conflict situations reduce transparency and limit effective global climate action.
- 13. Conflict as Reverse Development:** Environmental damage sets back development for years. Progress in climate and biodiversity protection is lost.

### Environmental Impact During Occupations and Resource Inequality

1. **Weak Environmental Protection and Governance:** Environmental obligations remain unclear during occupations. Development slows and environmental programmes weaken.
2. **Damage to Infrastructure and Landscapes:** Military presence damages land through construction and movement. Walls and barriers disrupt ecosystems and wildlife.
3. **Poor Waste Management at Military Bases:** Improper waste handling harms public health and ecosystems. Pollution increases in occupied areas.
4. **Inequitable Resource Use and Over Extraction:** Occupying powers control water and minerals. This leads to resource depletion and environmental degradation.
5. **Limited Environmental Rights for Local Population:** People face poor services and higher pollution. They lack equal access to environmental protection.
6. **Politically Driven Development without Oversight:** Infrastructure projects are carried out with limited environmental checks. This increases long-term damage.

### Post Conflict Phase Long Term Environmental Consequences

1. **Weak Governance and Institutional Failure:** Environmental systems remain weak after conflicts. Limited focus is given due to social and economic priorities.
2. **Debris and Waste Management Challenges:** Large volumes of rubble create pollution risks. Poor disposal methods increase environmental harm.
3. **Continuation of Harmful Practices:** Survival practices from conflict continue after peace. These include unsustainable resource use and pollution.
4. **Land Rights Issues and Environmental Pressure:** Return of displaced people increases pressure on land. This leads to deforestation and resource stress.
5. **Sharp Rise in Deforestation:** Forest clearing increases rapidly in post conflict areas. It often exceeds state control capacity.
6. **Military Pollution and Base Impacts:** Continued military presence causes pollution. Practices like burn pits harm health and environment.
7. **Landmine Clearance and Soil Damage:** Removal of explosive remnants damages soil and land use. It also causes local pollution.
8. **Long Term Impact on Environmental Governance:** Damage to governance affects climate, biodiversity, and pollution control. Recovery remains slow.

9. **High Environmental Cost of Reconstruction:** Rebuilding cities requires large resources. This increases emissions and environmental stress.

### Environmental Opportunities for Sustainable Recovery and Peacebuilding

1. **Scope for Cooperation through Shared Resources:** Shared natural resources can promote dialogue between conflicting parties. Common environmental threats encourage cooperation.
2. **Shift towards Renewable Energy:** Unstable energy supply can lead to adoption of solar power. This reduces dependence on fossil fuels.
3. **Green Reconstruction Opportunities:** Post conflict rebuilding allows for sustainable development models. It creates chances to build greener systems.
4. **Strengthening Environmental Legal Frameworks:** New laws and systems can improve resource management. There is growing focus on accountability.
5. **Rising Global Awareness and Accountability:** Public attention to environmental damage is increasing. This supports calls for stronger protection and data systems.

### Conclusion

Conflicts cause long lasting environmental damage across all phases by increasing emissions, destroying ecosystems, and weakening governance systems. These impacts are global and transboundary in nature. They also reduce international cooperation and delay climate action. Ensuring accountability and strengthening environmental protection during conflicts are essential. Promoting sustainable recovery is equally important to prevent irreversible damage and ensure a stable and liveable future for all.

### Question for practice:

Q. Discuss the environmental impact of wars across pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict phases, with suitable examples.

Source: [Businessline](#) And [Conflict and environment Observatory](#)

## How will India's new Nationally Determined Contribution accelerate climate Action?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Environment

### Introduction

India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), approved on March 25, 2026, raises targets on clean energy, emissions intensity, and carbon sinks. It comes when emissions growth is slowing. While it signals stronger ambition under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, its ability to accelerate real climate action remains uncertain, as such pledges may reflect trends rather than drive change.

### Nature and Evolution of NDCs in the Global Climate Framework

1. **Mandatory submission but voluntary targets:** Under the Paris Agreement, countries must submit NDCs, but targets remain voluntary and self-defined.
2. **Progressive increase in ambition:** India's 2022 targets included **50% non-fossil capacity, 45% emissions intensity reduction, and 2.5–3 billion tonnes carbon sink**, which are now raised.
3. **Closing global gaps in commitments:** India and Argentina were the only G20 countries without a 2035 NDC by 2025, and this update fills that gap.
4. **Limited enforcement reduces impact:** Voluntary nature means targets depend on domestic policies and cannot ensure compliance.
5. **Early achievement builds credibility:** India already achieved around **52% non-fossil installed capacity by early 2026**, ahead of its 2030 target, showing implementation strength.

### India's Enhanced Targets

1. **Higher clean energy ambition:** The new target commits to **60% installed electric capacity from non-fossil sources by 2035**, requiring only a modest increase from current levels.
2. **Energy mix still coal-dependent:** Despite capacity gains, coal still contributes **about 69% of electricity generation**, showing slow transition in actual output.
3. **Stronger emissions intensity reduction:** India aims to cut emissions intensity by **47% from 2005 levels**, building on a **36% reduction already achieved by 2020**.
4. **Expanded carbon sink goal:** The carbon sink target has increased to **3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent**, up from **2.5–3 billion tonnes** earlier.
5. **Qualitative climate commitments:** The NDC includes goals on **climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable lifestyles, and domestic and international climate finance mobilisation**.
6. **Alignment with long-term strategy:** The targets support India's **net-zero goal for 2070**, while balancing development and energy security needs.

### India's Emissions Trend

1. **Sharp slowdown in emissions growth:** India's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions grew only **0.7% in 2025**, the slowest rate since 2001 (excluding 2020).
2. **Power sector driving change:** Emissions from the power sector fell **3.8%**, with coal-based generation declining for the first time outside pandemic years since 1973.
3. **Rapid clean energy expansion:** In 2025, India added **47 GW solar, 6.3 GW wind, 4 GW hydro, and 0.6 GW nuclear**, enough to meet up to **5% demand growth**.
4. **Sectoral imbalance persists:** In 2025, steel emissions rose **8%** and cement **10%**, contributing to the overall emissions increase despite a decline in the power sector.

5. **Possible turning point ahead:** Clean energy additions may match demand growth by **2026**, indicating a structural shift in emissions trajectory.

#### Mixed Global Evidence

1. **Limited impact of NDCs globally:** The UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2025 shows countries remain off track despite three NDC cycles.
2. **Insufficient progress toward 1.5°C goal:** Current NDCs close **less than 14% of the emissions gap**, according to the World Resources Institute.
3. **Weak policy depth in NDCs:** Analysis of 101 submissions found **94% had energy goals**, but none aligned fully with the COP28 “UAE Consensus”.
4. **Major omissions in commitments:** No country set targets to phase down oil and gas, and **three-fourths ignored fossil fuel subsidy reforms**.
5. **Dependence on insufficient finance:** Many developing countries rely on international climate finance, which remains inadequate.
6. **NDCs reflect progress more than drive change:** They often record ongoing trends in clean energy rather than causing structural shifts away from fossil fuels.

#### Structural Drivers Beyond NDCs

1. **Rapid growth of renewables globally:** Solar and wind installations reached a record **814 GW in 2025**, and renewables overtook coal in electricity generation.
2. **Economic growth shapes emissions path:** India’s GDP is projected to grow at **6.1% annually till 2035**, allowing emissions to rise even with intensity reduction.
3. **Cost-driven renewable expansion:** Declining costs and industrial competition, especially from China, are accelerating clean energy adoption.
4. **Domestic policy and investment matter more:** Real progress depends on **implementation, infrastructure, and market trends**, not just formal pledges.
5. **Energy security concerns dominate decisions:** Geopolitical shocks and fuel shortages push India to diversify energy sources rather than rapidly phase out fossil fuels.

#### Key Challenges and Contradictions in India’s Climate Pathway

1. **Continued reliance on coal:** India plans **100 GW of new coal capacity** and expansion in coal-based steel production.
2. **Petrochemical and industrial expansion:** Investments of **\$1 trillion in petrochemicals by 2040** indicate continued fossil fuel dependence.
3. **Grid and infrastructure bottlenecks:** Over **37 GW of renewable capacity remains stranded** due to transmission and contract issues.

4. **Gap between capacity and generation:** Non-fossil sources form over **50% of installed capacity**, but only **22.4% of actual generation**, while coal still provides **69%**.
5. **Carbon sink measurement concerns:** Forest targets rely on methods criticised for **non-transparency and masking deforestation**, with **1.3 million hectares lost (2015–2024)**.
6. **Limited land for afforestation:** Less than **0.5% of land is available for restoration**, constraining future carbon sink expansion.

## Conclusion

India's updated NDC signals stronger ambition but reflects a cautious balance between climate action, growth, and energy security. Clean energy expansion and slowing emissions show progress, yet structural contradictions persist. As NDCs often document rather than drive change, real acceleration will depend on policy execution, grid reforms, and reducing fossil dependence. Bridging gaps in finance, transparency, and implementation remains essential.

## Question for practice:

Examine how India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) reflects both progress and limitations in climate action.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

## The continued pursuit of the perfect election

Source: The post "**The continued pursuit of the perfect election**" has been created, based on "**The continued pursuit of the perfect election**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 31st March 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2-Governance

**Context:** Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of **Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Puducherry** are being conducted after the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls**, which removed duplicate, shifted, and deceased voters. The revision exercise has triggered political debate regarding electoral neutrality and transparency, highlighting concerns about electoral integrity. The developments have renewed attention on the role of the **Election Commission of India** in ensuring free and fair elections.

## Scale and Strength of India's Election Management

1. Elections across these five regions are being conducted through approximately **2.19 lakh polling stations**, serving nearly **17.4 crore voters**.
2. Around **25 lakh election officials**, including **8.5 lakh security personnel and 49,000 micro-observers**, have been deployed to ensure smooth conduct of elections.
3. Election officials travel to remote and difficult terrains to ensure voting access even to a handful of electors, demonstrating India's commitment to inclusive democracy.
4. Under **Section 28A of the Representation of the People Act**, all election officials function under the supervision and control of the Election Commission during elections to maintain neutrality.

## Measures Taken by the Election Commission to Ensure Free and Fair Elections

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## 1. Deployment of Observers and Security Forces

- a. The Election Commission has deployed more than **1,100 central observers** to monitor the electoral process across constituencies.
- b. Security personnel have been stationed at sensitive locations to prevent violence, intimidation, and malpractice during polling.
- c. The Election Commission has transferred several administrative and police officials to ensure neutrality and maintain public confidence in the electoral process.

## 2. Reduction in Multi-Phase Polling

- a. The Election Commission has attempted to reduce the number of polling phases to improve election efficiency and reduce security risks.
- b. For example, polling in **West Bengal** has been reduced from **eight phases in 2021 to two phases** in the current elections.
- c. This reflects improvements in election management capacity and coordination of security forces.

## The “Four-M” Challenge to Election Integrity

The Election Commission has **identified four major threats** that continue to affect free and fair elections in India.

### 1. Money Power

- a. Electoral inducements in the form of cash, liquor, gifts, and welfare transfers continue to influence voter behaviour during elections.
- b. Authorities seized more than **₹10,000 crore worth of inducements during the 2024 General Elections**, indicating the magnitude of the problem.
- c. Competitive populism and unrealistic campaign promises also weaken fiscal discipline and electoral ethics.

### 2. Muscle Power

- a. Deployment of central security forces has reduced direct intimidation of voters in many areas.
- b. However, politically sensitive regions such as **West Bengal** continue to experience risks of election-related violence, especially post-poll violence.

### 3. Misinformation

- a. The spread of fake news, deepfakes, and misleading political advertisements continues to influence voter perception.
- b. The Election Commission has mandated pre-certification of political advertisements before publication near polling days.
- c. Social media platforms have adopted voluntary codes of ethics, but enforcement remains only partially effective.

### 4. Model Code of Conduct Violations

- a. Appeals based on caste, religion, ethnicity, and sectarian identity continue to occur during election campaigns.
- b. Political manifestos sometimes include fiscally unsustainable promises that **challenge ethical campaign practices**.

### **Role of Technology and Monitoring Mechanisms**

1. The Election Commission has introduced **round-the-clock live webcasting of polling stations** to improve transparency and monitoring.
2. Surveillance teams and flying squads have been deployed to monitor the movement of cash, liquor, and other inducement materials.
3. Authorities are also monitoring digital financial transactions to prevent electoral bribery through online channels.
4. These measures strengthen transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

### **Voter-Centric Electoral Reforms**

#### **1. SVEEP Programme**

- a. The **Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)** programme has significantly improved voter awareness and participation across the country.
- b. The programme has encouraged ethical voting behaviour and strengthened citizen engagement in democratic processes.

#### **2. Inclusive Voting Measures**

- a. The Election Commission has introduced home voting facilities for voters aged **above 85 years** and for **persons with disabilities** to ensure inclusive participation.
- b. The introduction of larger font sizes and colour photographs of candidates on electronic voting machines has improved voter accessibility.
- c. Facilities for depositing mobile phones at polling stations have enhanced the secrecy and integrity of the voting process.

#### **3. Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls**

- a. The Special Intensive Revision exercise has removed absentee, shifted, and deceased voters from electoral rolls to improve their accuracy.
- b. The revision process is expected to enhance voter participation by ensuring cleaner electoral rolls.
- c. However, the exercise has also generated political debate regarding transparency and neutrality in implementation.

### **Persistent Challenges in Ensuring Electoral Integrity**

#### **1. Electoral Freebies and Inducements**

- a. Electoral inducements in cash or kind continue to influence voter choices despite regulatory measures.
- b. Attempts by the judiciary and the Election Commission to regulate campaign freebies have achieved limited success so far.

## 2. Election-Related Violence

- a. Some states continue to witness election-related violence before and after polling, affecting voter confidence and participation.
- b. Political polarization further increases the vulnerability of certain regions during elections.

## 3. Digital Misinformation

- a. The rapid spread of misinformation through social media platforms continues to challenge election regulators.
- b. Deepfake technology has further complicated efforts to ensure truthful campaign communication.

**4. Identity-Based Campaigning:** Campaign appeals based on caste, religion, ethnicity, and regional identity continue despite legal restrictions under electoral laws.

**5. Concerns About Administrative Neutrality:** Transfers of administrative officials during elections sometimes become politically contentious and affect perceptions of institutional independence.

## Role and Responsibility of Voters

1. Voters play a crucial role in protecting the integrity of elections by rejecting inducements offered in cash or kind.
2. Citizens should resist misinformation and divisive political narratives while exercising their franchise responsibly.
3. Ethical voting behaviour strengthens democracy and reinforces the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

## Way Forward

**1. Strengthening Institutional Independence of the Election Commission:** The independence and functional autonomy of the Election Commission should be strengthened through transparent appointment mechanisms and institutional safeguards.

**2. Regulating Electoral Freebies and Campaign Financing:** Clear legal guidelines should be developed to regulate election-time freebies and improve transparency in political funding.

**3. Combating Digital Misinformation:** Stronger regulatory frameworks and technological tools should be adopted to counter fake news and deepfake content during elections.

**4. Ensuring Strict Enforcement of Model Code of Conduct:** Violations of the Model Code of Conduct should attract stronger penalties to discourage identity-based campaigning and unethical practices.

**5. Enhancing Voter Awareness Programmes:** Expansion of voter education initiatives such as SVEEP can promote informed and ethical voting behaviour across regions.

**6. Strengthening Security and Surveillance Mechanisms:** Improved coordination between election authorities and security agencies can further reduce election-related violence and inducements.

**Conclusion:** India's electoral system demonstrates strong administrative capacity and institutional resilience under the supervision of the Election Commission of India. However, persistent challenges such as money

power, misinformation, electoral violence, and identity-based campaigning continue to affect electoral integrity. Strengthening institutional safeguards along with responsible participation by citizens is essential for ensuring free, fair, and credible elections in India.

**Question:** Free and fair elections are the foundation of India's democratic legitimacy." Discuss the major challenges faced by the Election Commission of India in ensuring electoral integrity in recent years.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### Prioritising Healthcare for a Viksit Bharat 2047

**Source:** The post "Prioritising Healthcare for a Viksit Bharat 2047" has been created, based on "Prioritising Healthcare for a Viksit Bharat 2047" published in "PIB" on 31st March 2026.

**UPSC Syllabus:** GS Paper-2-Governance

**Context:** Healthcare plays a crucial role in achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047** by strengthening human capital and improving productivity. The **Union Budget 2026-27** has increased allocation to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare by **10% to ₹1,06,530 crore**, reflecting the government's commitment to universal health coverage, preventive care, digital integration, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure.

#### Key Healthcare Announcements in Budget 2026-27

##### 1. Increase in Health Sector Allocation

- a. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been allocated **₹1,06,530 crore**, which represents a **10% increase over the revised estimates of 2025-26**.
- b. The allocation reflects a **194% increase over the last 12 years**, demonstrating sustained government commitment toward improving healthcare delivery.
- c. The Department of Health Research has been allocated **₹4,821 crore**, which will support innovation and medical research activities in the country.

##### 2. Strengthening Major Healthcare Schemes

###### a. Insurance and Healthcare Access

- i. The allocation for **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)** has increased to **₹9,500 crore**, ensuring continued access to health insurance coverage for vulnerable households.
- ii. The scheme provides **health insurance coverage of up to ₹5 lakh per family annually** to more than **12 crore economically weaker families**, thereby improving affordability of healthcare services.

b. **Primary Healthcare Expansion:** The allocation for the **National Health Mission (NHM)** has increased to **₹39,390 crore**, strengthening primary healthcare services across rural and urban areas.

###### c. Medical Infrastructure Strengthening

- i. The allocation for **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)** has increased to **₹11,307 crore**, supporting expansion of tertiary healthcare infrastructure.

- ii. The allocation for **PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM)** has increased significantly to **₹4,770 crore**, strengthening disease surveillance and public health infrastructure.

**d. Disease Control Programmes**

- i. The allocation for the **National AIDS and STD Control Programme** has increased by over **30%**, reflecting the government's focus on communicable disease control.
- ii. The allocation for **Blood Transfusion Services** has increased by **37%**, improving **emergency healthcare response capacity**.

**3. Digital Health Ecosystem**

- a. The allocation for the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** has increased, supporting the creation of a nationwide digital health ecosystem.
- b. The mission promotes **digital health IDs, interoperability of medical records, telemedicine services, and electronic health data exchange**, thereby improving accessibility and efficiency of healthcare delivery.

**4. Strengthening Medical Education and Workforce**

- a. The Union Budget 2026–27 proposes training **one lakh allied health professionals** over the next five years.
- b. It also proposes training **1.5 lakh caregivers**, which will help address shortages in the healthcare workforce.
- c. Increased allocation for **Human Resources for Health and Medical Education** will strengthen the availability of trained medical professionals across the country.

**5. Customs Duty Exemption on Cancer Drugs**

- a. The government has announced **100% customs duty exemption on 17 new cancer drugs**, which will significantly reduce treatment costs for cancer patients.
- b. This initiative will improve access to affordable cancer treatment across the country.

**6. Expansion of AYUSH and Traditional Medicine**

- a. The Union Budget proposes establishing **three new All India Institutes of Ayurveda** to strengthen education and research in traditional medicine.
- b. The budget also proposes upgrading the **WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre at Jamnagar**, positioning India as a global leader in traditional healthcare systems.
- c. The integration of AYUSH systems into regional medical hubs will strengthen **medical value tourism and global outreach of traditional medicine**.

**7. Focus on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**

- a. The Economic Survey 2025–26 highlights that **non-communicable diseases account for 57% of total deaths in India during 2021–23**.
- b. The government is strengthening the **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases** to identify high-risk individuals and provide timely treatment.

**8. Support to Medical Research Institutions**

- a. The allocation for the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has increased significantly, supporting research in vaccines, diagnostics, and biomedical innovation.
- b. Increased funding for research institutions will strengthen India's preparedness for emerging public health challenges.

### Importance for Viksit Bharat 2047

1. Increased health sector investment will support progress toward **universal health coverage**.
2. Strengthening digital health infrastructure will improve efficiency and accessibility of healthcare services.
3. Expansion of medical workforce capacity will address shortages of trained professionals.
4. Increased focus on non-communicable diseases will improve long-term health outcomes.
5. Promotion of AYUSH systems will enhance India's global health leadership and soft power.

### Challenges in India's Healthcare Sector

**1. Infrastructure Gaps:** India continues to face shortages of hospitals, beds, diagnostic facilities, and medical equipment, particularly in rural areas. The availability of hospital beds per thousand population remains inadequate in several states.

**2. Rural-Urban Healthcare Divide:** A large proportion of India's population lives in rural areas where access to specialists and quality healthcare facilities remains limited. Urban hospitals are often overburdened due to increased patient inflow from surrounding regions.

**3. Shortage of Medical Professionals:** India continues to face shortages of doctors, nurses, and specialists relative to population requirements. This shortage leads to long waiting times and delays in treatment for patients.

**4. Skill Deficit in Healthcare Workforce:** Many healthcare professionals lack training in advanced diagnostic tools and modern treatment technologies. Limited skill development opportunities affect quality of service delivery in public healthcare institutions.

**5. Low Public Health Expenditure:** Public expenditure on healthcare remains lower compared to global standards. High out-of-pocket expenditure continues to impose financial burdens on households.

**6. Inter-State Healthcare Disparities:** Significant disparities exist among states in terms of infrastructure availability and per-capita healthcare expenditure. These disparities affect equitable healthcare access across regions.

**7. Accessibility and Affordability Constraints:** The number of community health centres remains insufficient relative to population requirements. Several states lack adequate drug testing laboratories and diagnostic facilities. Health insurance coverage remains limited in many parts of the country.

### Way Forward

**1. Increasing Public Health Expenditure:** The government should increase public health expenditure to achieve the target of **2.5% of GDP on healthcare spending**.

**2. Strengthening Rural Healthcare Infrastructure:** Expansion of primary health centres and community health centres should be prioritised to improve rural healthcare accessibility.

**3. Expanding Healthcare Workforce Capacity:** Increasing medical education seats and strengthening training programmes for healthcare professionals will improve service delivery.

**4. Promoting Digital Health Technologies:** Wider adoption of telemedicine, artificial intelligence-based diagnostics, and electronic health records will improve efficiency of healthcare services.

**5. Strengthening Preventive Healthcare Strategy:** Greater emphasis should be placed on early screening, lifestyle disease prevention, and nutrition interventions.

**6. Expanding Insurance Coverage:** Expanding coverage under public health insurance schemes such as PM-JAY will reduce out-of-pocket expenditure.

**7. Promoting Public-Private Partnerships:** Public-private partnerships can support infrastructure development, diagnostics expansion, and pharmaceutical innovation.

**Conclusion:** The Union Budget 2026-27 strengthens healthcare as a central pillar of **Viksit Bharat 2047** by expanding infrastructure, workforce capacity, digital health systems, disease prevention strategies, and traditional medicine integration. Addressing persistent gaps in accessibility, affordability, and regional disparities will be essential for achieving equitable and resilient healthcare outcomes across the country.

**Question:** The Union Budget 2026-27 reflects India's commitment towards strengthening healthcare as a pillar of Viksit Bharat 2047." Discuss key initiatives, challenges, and the way forward.

Source: [PIB](#)

### Ensuring federalism within delimitation

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

#### Introduction

Delimitation is one of the most politically significant constitutional exercises. With the 2026 Census approaching, India will soon need to redraw parliamentary constituencies and reallocate seats among states. The key challenge is to ensure fair representation without disadvantaging states that have successfully controlled their population growth.

#### Constitutional and Legal Framework: Governing Delimitation in India

- **Article 81** requires that the seat-to-population ratio be "as far as practicable, the same for all States"- a reasonable standard in 1951 and 1971, when State populations had not yet diverged significantly.
- **The 84th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002** extended the freeze on Lok Sabha and State Legislature seats until after the 2026 Census, explicitly linking it to the progress of family planning in States-indicating that demographic performance was always intended to matter.

- **Timeline:** The Census 2026 results are expected by October 2028, after which the Delimitation Commission (DC) will be constituted, with the 2029 Lok Sabha elections to follow.

### The Demographic divergence problem

- **Early achievers:** National Family Health Surveys-5 (2019-21) data shows that nine states - Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Goa, and Telangana - had already reached the replacement-level **Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.1 or below before 2005**, often through sustained public health investment.
- **Lagging states:** Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, and Manipur continue to exceed the national TFR mean - with states above the average running 45% higher than early achievers.
- **The inequity trap:** A purely population-based delimitation would hand more seats to states that grew faster, effectively penalising good governance - and in doing so, contradict the very spirit behind the 84th Amendment

### The Demographic Performance (DemPer) Principle - A Proposed Solution

- **Finance Commission precedent:** The FC already blends demographic performance with population size (50% weight) while deciding devolution - offering a well-worn constitutional path for introducing non-population criteria into allocation exercises.
- **Protection of existing seats:** The existing 543 Lok Sabha seats stay untouched; DemPer would apply only to additional seats beyond 543, keeping the population principle firmly in the driver's seat.
- **Two-part DemPer index:** Early achievement of  $TFR \leq 2.1$  before 2005 carries 10% weight; the rate of TFR decline between 2005 and 2021 carries 90% — rewarding sustained effort rather than historical head-starts.
- **Net outcome:** All states gain seats; more populous states still gain more in absolute terms; but demographic achievers no longer lose their proportional ground - striking a workable balance between federal fairness and electoral arithmetic

### Key Challenges in the Delimitation Exercise

- **North-South political tension:** A numbers-only approach risks shrinking the parliamentary footprint of southern states, stoking regional grievances and straining the cooperative federalism that India's governance depends on.
- **Optimal Lok Sabha size:** India's population has nearly tripled since 1971 (541 million to 1.4 billion). Expanding seats proportionally risks turning Parliament into an unwieldy body where serious debate becomes impossible; a cap of around 700 seats seems prudent.
- **Misframing as a binary conflict:** Casting this as a north-south contest misses the bigger picture - Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Goa also met stabilisation goals early, making federal equity a genuinely pan-India concern.
- **Implementation complexity:** Building a defensible DemPer index demands consistent data across NFHS rounds and political consensus on weightage — no small ask for a body as consequential as the Delimitation Commission

### Way Forward

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- **Dual-criterion delimitation:** The DC must formally combine population size with a Demographic Performance index - structured so that population remains dominant, but responsible governance is genuinely rewarded.
- **Cap Lok Sabha at 700 seats:** Parliament should set a legislative ceiling to prevent runaway expansion from hollowing out the quality of debate and making the House ungovernable.
- **Periodic constitutional review:** The 2001–2026 freeze shows the danger of kicking the can too far down the road. Institutionalising incremental seat additions after each Census would prevent imbalances from silently building up.
- **Transparent DemPer methodology:** The DC should open its demographic criteria to public consultation before finalising allocations — giving the process cross-party and cross-regional legitimacy it will badly need.
- **Learn from the Finance Commission:** The FC's tried-and-tested formula -weaving together population, area, income distance, and demographic performance - offers a practical institutional blueprint the DC can adapt without major constitutional friction

### Conclusion

Delimitation is not just a technical exercise but a test of India's federal balance. Integrating demographic performance with population can ensure fair representation while preserving federal harmony.

**Question for Practice-** Delimitation in India raises a critical tension between democratic equality and federal fairness." Discuss in the context of the upcoming post-2026 delimitation exercise.

Source- [TH](#)