

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



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Features :

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

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Tagore-Gandhi Ideological Divide

Source: The post “Tagore-Gandhi Ideological Divide” has been created, based on “On Rabindranath Tagore’s birth anniversary, recalling his clash with Mahatma Gandhi over the ‘cult’ of the charkha” published in “Indian Express” on 9th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-1-Modern Indian History

Context: Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi shared deep mutual respect and friendship, but they differed on several philosophical, political and economic issues. Their disagreement over the charkha became the strongest symbol of their contrasting visions of nationalism, society and human freedom.

Ideological Differences Between Tagore and Gandhi

1. Difference on Nationalism

- a. Gandhi believed that mass nationalism and movements like Non-Cooperation were necessary to unite Indians against British rule.
- b. Tagore feared that aggressive nationalism could become narrow, emotional and intolerant.
- c. Tagore believed that nationalism should be balanced with universal humanism and international cooperation.

2. Difference on the Charkha and Khadi

- a. Gandhi considered the charkha a symbol of self-reliance, dignity of labour and economic upliftment of villages.
- b. Gandhi believed that spinning khadi would reduce dependence on foreign cloth and morally discipline Congress workers.
- c. Tagore opposed what he called the “cult of the charkha” because he believed it encouraged blind obedience and mechanical repetition.
- d. Tagore argued that compulsory spinning ignored the diversity of human talents and creativity.
- e. Tagore stated that repetitive spinning engaged “the muscles and not the mind”.

3. Difference on Individual Freedom

- a. Gandhi emphasised collective discipline and mass participation in national movements.
- b. Tagore strongly defended individual freedom and independent thinking.
- c. Tagore feared that excessive devotion to Gandhi’s ideas could suppress intellectual freedom and critical reasoning.

4. Difference on Modernity and Technology

- a. Gandhi was critical of excessive industrialisation and modern machinery because he feared they would destroy village economies.
- b. Gandhi supported simple village-based production and self-sufficient rural communities.
- c. Tagore believed that India should embrace science, technology and global intellectual exchange.
- d. Tagore argued that isolation from modern scientific progress would weaken India.

5. Difference on Religion and Social Philosophy

- a. Gandhi often connected moral issues with public events and spiritual interpretations.
- b. After the Bihar earthquake of 1934, Gandhi described the disaster as divine punishment for untouchability.
- c. Tagore rejected this interpretation and argued that natural disasters should not be linked with moral sins.

6. Difference on the Method of Social Transformation

- a. Gandhi focused on mass mobilisation, constructive programmes and moral discipline to transform society.
- b. Tagore focused on education, creativity, cultural growth and intellectual development.
- c. Gandhi represented political activism and social action, whereas Tagore represented artistic and philosophical reflection.

Similarities Between Tagore and Gandhi

1. Both opposed British colonial rule and supported India's freedom struggle.
2. Both criticised social inequalities and untouchability.
3. Both believed in the moral regeneration of Indian society.
4. Both maintained mutual respect despite strong disagreements.

Significance of the Debate

1. **The Gandhi–Tagore debate** reflected larger tensions within the Indian national movement.
2. Their disagreements highlighted the conflict between nationalism and universalism, tradition and modernity, and collective discipline and individual freedom.
3. Their debates enriched Indian political thought and demonstrated the importance of democratic dissent in public life.

Conclusion: The ideological divide between Tagore and Gandhi reflected two different visions of India's future. Gandhi viewed the charkha as a tool for national unity and moral regeneration, whereas Tagore feared that its excessive glorification would limit creativity and intellectual freedom. Despite their differences, both leaders made significant contributions to India's freedom struggle and intellectual heritage.

Question: Discuss the ideological differences between Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

A watershed moment in India's defence posture

Source: The post "A watershed moment in India's defence posture" has been created, based on "A watershed moment in India's defence posture" published in "The Hindu" on 9th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Internal Security

Context: Operation Sindoor, launched on May 7, 2025, was India's military response to the Pahalgam terror attack of April 22, 2025. According to R. K. S. Bhaduria, the operation marked a major shift in India's politico-military doctrine by moving from "reactive restraint" to a policy of decisive retaliation against cross-border terrorism.

Significance of Operation Sindoor

1. Shift in India's Security Doctrine

- a. India earlier followed a policy of "reactive restraint" in dealing with cross-border terrorism.
- b. Operation Sindoor reinforced the "zero tolerance" approach declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- c. The operation established that acts of cross-border terrorism would be treated as acts of war.

2. Demonstration of Political Resolve

- a. The operation reflected strong political leadership and strategic resolve.
- b. The government showed willingness to act despite risks of escalation with a nuclear-armed neighbour.
- c. The operation demonstrated that India would not submit to nuclear blackmail or external pressure.

3. Integrated Tri-Service Military Action

- a. The operation tested coordination among the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and Indian Navy.
- b. The three services carried out integrated strikes on terror infrastructure across Pakistan.
- c. The operation showed improved jointness and operational synergy among India's armed forces.

4. Precision and Military Effectiveness

- a. India carried out precision strikes on multiple terror targets including Bahawalpur and Muridke.
- b. The Indian Air Force reportedly targeted several Pakistani air bases and military assets.
- c. India's integrated air defence system, including the S-400 missile system, successfully countered Pakistani attacks.
- d. The operation highlighted India's capability for rapid and high-impact military action.

5. Strategic Signalling and Deterrence

- a. The strikes conveyed a strong message to terrorist organisations and their sponsors.
- b. The operation established a "new normal" in India's response to terrorism.
- c. It signalled that India was prepared to undertake calibrated military action when required.

6. Impact on Pakistan

- a. Pakistan reportedly suffered extensive damage to terror infrastructure and military installations.
- b. The article argues that Pakistan misread India's strategic resolve.
- c. Pakistan was eventually compelled to seek a ceasefire after sustained military pressure.

7. Push for Indigenous Defence Manufacturing

- a. The operation highlighted the importance of indigenous defence capability.

- b. The article stressed the need to “Innovate, Design and Manufacture” at scale.
- c. Indigenous systems reportedly performed effectively during the operation.
- d. Greater participation of startups, MSMEs, DRDO and private industry was emphasised.

8. Need for Defence Modernisation

- a. The operation underlined the importance of constant military readiness.
- b. It highlighted the need for reforms in aerospace, cyber security and Artificial Intelligence.
- c. The article argued for accelerated investment in India’s defence ecosystem and Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence production.

Challenges and Concerns

- 1. Escalation between two nuclear-armed countries remains a serious concern.
- 2. Sustained military readiness requires high financial and technological investment.
- 3. India must balance military assertiveness with diplomatic stability and regional peace.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Indigenous Defence Production

- a. India should accelerate indigenous manufacturing under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- b. Greater support should be provided to DRDO, startups, MSMEs and private defence companies.

2. Improve Jointness Among Armed Forces

- a. India should strengthen theatre commands and integrated military planning.
- b. Better coordination among the Army, Navy and Air Force should be institutionalised.

3. Invest in Advanced Technology

- a. India should expand capabilities in cyber security, Artificial Intelligence, drones and space defence.
- b. Continuous modernisation of surveillance and missile defence systems is necessary.

4. Enhance Border and Intelligence Management

- a. Intelligence-sharing mechanisms among agencies should be improved.
- b. Greater technological monitoring of borders and terror networks is required.

5. Maintain Strategic and Diplomatic Balance

- a. India should combine military preparedness with diplomatic engagement.
- b. International cooperation against terrorism should be strengthened through multilateral forums.

Conclusion: Operation Sindoor marked a significant transformation in India’s defence posture by combining political resolve, military integration and strategic deterrence. The operation demonstrated India’s willingness to respond decisively to terrorism while also accelerating the push towards defence modernisation and self-reliance. India must now sustain this momentum through technological advancement, defence reforms and stronger strategic preparedness.

Question: “Operation Sindoor marks a watershed moment in India’s defence posture.” Discuss the significance of Operation Sindoor in shaping India’s national security doctrine and defence preparedness.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Nuclear restraint hinges on diplomacy, not force

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests

Introduction

The global nuclear non-proliferation regime is facing growing instability as diplomatic approaches are increasingly replaced by coercive counterproliferation measures such as sanctions, military strikes, covert operations, and sabotage. While these policies aimed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, their selective application weakened trust in international institutions, increased geopolitical tensions, and encouraged insecurity among states. The growing dependence on force-based approaches now threatens the credibility of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the stability of the global nuclear order.

Non-Proliferation vs Counterproliferation

1. **Meaning and Goal of Non-Proliferation:** Non-proliferation refers to the global effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and sensitive nuclear technology. Its main goal is to maintain global stability, reduce nuclear risks, and encourage peaceful use of nuclear energy under frameworks such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
2. **Approach of Non-Proliferation:** Non-proliferation mainly depends on diplomacy, international cooperation, arms control agreements, IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspections, and voluntary compliance by states. It works through transparency, trust, and negotiated solutions rather than force.
3. **Meaning and Goal of Counterproliferation:** Counterproliferation refers to aggressive measures used to stop states or groups from developing weapons of mass destruction. It became prominent during the 1990s due to fears of nuclear terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation.
4. **Approach and Core Difference:** Counterproliferation relies on sanctions, military threats, sabotage, cyberattacks, interdictions, and covert operations. Unlike non-proliferation, which focuses on long-term cooperation and restraint, counterproliferation focuses on immediate security threats through coercive and force-based measures.

Problems with Counterproliferation Policies

1. **Risk of Escalation and Retaliation:** Military strikes and covert attacks can trigger retaliation and increase tensions between states. These operations may also strengthen a country’s determination to develop nuclear weapons for security.
2. **Failure to Fully Eliminate Nuclear Programmes:** Counterproliferation depends heavily on accurate intelligence about hidden nuclear infrastructure. Even advanced military operations may fail to destroy underground or concealed facilities completely.
3. **Encouraging Nuclear Ambitions:** Attacks on nuclear facilities can produce the opposite effect by increasing interest in nuclear weapons. Israel’s 1981 attack on Iraq’s Osirak reactor pushed Iraq towards a nuclear weapons programme.
4. **Distrust of International Institutions:** Counterproliferation policies created distrust between agencies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and major powers. Objective inspections increasingly became influenced by political goals and security interests.

5. **Use of Unverified Intelligence:** Narratives about “imminent” nuclear threats encouraged selective use of intelligence and incomplete information. This created conditions for pre-emptive military action without conclusive evidence.
6. **Emerging Technology Risks:** Counterproliferation operations increasingly use cyber tools, drones, and remote-controlled systems. These technologies raise the risk of targeting errors, rapid escalation, and difficulties in identifying responsibility.
7. **Weakening Transparency and Trust:** The non-proliferation regime depends on openness, verification, and cooperation between states. Covert attacks and military operations reduce trust and increase mutual suspicion among countries.

Iran’s Nuclear Programme and Diplomatic Failures

1. **Iran’s Peaceful Nuclear Claim:** Iran maintained that its nuclear programme was meant for peaceful civilian purposes under the NPT framework. It also allowed IAEA inspections, though at times irregularly.
2. **Diplomatic Agreements with the International Community:** Iran signed the Tehran Declaration in 2003, the Additional Protocol in 2003, and the Paris Agreement with the EU-3 in 2004. These agreements aimed to reduce tensions and maintain negotiations.
3. **Rejection of Limited Enrichment Proposal:** In 2005, Iran proposed limited uranium enrichment for research and civilian use. The proposal was rejected despite Iran remaining an NPT signatory.
4. **Collapse of Nuclear Diplomacy:** The US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 severely damaged negotiations. Later tensions and military operations further weakened diplomatic engagement.
5. **Deepening Mistrust Between Iran and the West:** Iran viewed Western demands as unfair and politically motivated. Western countries accused Iran of insufficient cooperation and questioned its nuclear intentions.
6. **Growing Regional Insecurity:** The breakdown of diplomacy increased instability in West Asia. Missile launches, regional tensions, and military deployments increased fears of direct conflict.

Selective Application of Nuclear Policies

1. **Unequal Treatment of Different States:** Counterproliferation policies were applied selectively against some countries while others received diplomatic accommodation. This weakened the credibility of the non-proliferation regime.
2. **Iraq and the Use of Military Force:** The 2003 invasion of Iraq was launched on claims that Saddam Hussein intended to rebuild nuclear capabilities. The bombing campaign started despite the absence of hard evidence of an active nuclear weapons programme.
3. **North Korea’s Different Treatment:** North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and conducted a nuclear test in 2006. However, it mainly faced sanctions and diplomatic engagement instead of military invasion.
4. **Criticism of the NPT Structure:** Many countries viewed the NPT as discriminatory because it allowed five recognised nuclear powers to retain nuclear weapons while restricting others. This created dissatisfaction among non-nuclear states.
5. **Perception of Unequal Nuclear Order:** Selective application of nuclear policies created the perception that preventing proliferation is often linked to preserving geopolitical dominance rather than ensuring equal nuclear restraint.

Impact on the Global Nuclear Order

1. **Crisis in the Non-Proliferation Regime:** The global nuclear non-proliferation regime is facing a serious crisis. Arms control agreements, transparency mechanisms, and cooperation among major powers have weakened over time.

2. **Weakening of Arms Control Frameworks:** The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the last major arms control agreement between the US and Russia, is under threat. Russia and China are also attempting to reshape the rules of the nuclear order.
3. **Selective Coercion Fueling Proliferation:** Selective counterproliferation policies have encouraged some states to view nuclear weapons as protection against coercion and regime threats. Military pressure and sanctions often increased defiance instead of restraint.
4. **Weakening Trust in the Nuclear Order:** Selective implementation of counterproliferation policies reduced confidence in the fairness and neutrality of the global non-proliferation system.
5. **Decline of Cooperative Nuclear Governance:** Increasing reliance on covert operations and military responses reduced the role of diplomacy, transparency, and voluntary cooperation in nuclear governance.
6. **Escalation and Regional Instability:** Counterproliferation measures increased mistrust and retaliation between states.
7. **Threat to Peaceful Nuclear Rights:** Counterproliferation measures also affected rights under the NPT, which guarantee peaceful nuclear energy use. This created resentment among states that viewed such actions as unfair restrictions.
8. **Risk of Arms Races and Nuclear Competition:** Growing insecurity and weakening diplomacy may push more countries toward nuclear weapons programmes. This increases the danger of regional arms races and long-term instability.
9. **Independent Nuclear Deterrence Approaches:** Countries like India have refused to sign the NPT, pursuing instead a "Credible Minimum Deterrence" (CMD) posture, highlighting the failure of global regimes to treat all nations equally.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening Diplomatic Engagement:** Diplomacy, negotiations, and transparency must become the primary tools for managing nuclear disputes. Military coercion should not replace peaceful engagement.
2. **Reinforcing the IAEA Framework:** States should continue allowing IAEA access and inspections to maintain trust and transparency. Strong verification mechanisms reduce suspicion and conflict.
3. **Addressing Divisions Within the NPT:** Nuclear and non-nuclear states need to reduce growing mistrust within the NPT system. Greater commitment towards disarmament can improve confidence in the regime.
4. **Discouraging Covert Operations:** The risks of sabotage, assassinations, cyberattacks, and drone strikes should be openly discussed in non-proliferation debates. Ignoring these risks weakens international stability.
5. **Strengthening Security Assurances:** Countries under nuclear umbrellas should receive credible security commitments. This can reduce the perceived need for independent nuclear weapons programmes.

Conclusion

The growing shift from non-proliferation to coercive counterproliferation has weakened trust, increased insecurity, and damaged the credibility of the global nuclear order. Selective application of nuclear policies further deepened divisions within the NPT framework. Sustainable nuclear restraint requires diplomacy, transparency, equal treatment of states, and stronger international cooperation instead of force-driven responses.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the impact of counterproliferation policies on the credibility and stability of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Source: Indian Express

The elephant in India's data room

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure And Gs Paper 2- Governance

Introduction

India generates massive amounts of data through Ministries, welfare schemes, and public programmes. However, much of this information remains fragmented, inconsistent, and difficult to access or integrate across departments. Parliamentary questions frequently seek basic data that should already exist in standardised public databases. The deeper problem lies in weak data standardisation and poor interoperability between government systems. Without reliable and connected databases, welfare delivery, policymaking, parliamentary accountability, and economic planning become inefficient, inaccurate, and vulnerable to leakages.

Problems in India's Data Ecosystem

- 1. Fragmented data systems:** Different Ministries and departments use separate databases and do not follow common standards for indicators, regions, or time periods. This creates confusion and weak coordination across government systems.
- 2. Lack of interoperability:** Data collected for one programme often cannot be integrated smoothly with another database. Consolidating such information becomes slow, difficult, and vulnerable to errors.
- 3. Data abundance without usability:** India produces more data than before, but large volumes alone do not improve governance. Poor formatting and inconsistent definitions reduce the usefulness of information.
- 4. Basic information not publicly accessible:** Many parliamentary questions ask about toilets, pensions, or scheme beneficiaries. Such information should already exist in a clear, standardised, and easily accessible public database.
- 5. Weak standardisation practices:** NITI Aayog observed that government departments define even basic attributes differently. The absence of shared standards weakens the overall credibility of public data systems.

Impact on Welfare Delivery and Policymaking

- 1. Duplicate beneficiaries and fiscal leakages:** Welfare databases often contain repeated names of the same beneficiaries. According to a NITI Aayog report released in June 2025, such duplication increases spending by nearly 4%-7% annually.
- 2. Large savings through data clean-ups:** Removing 17.1 million ineligible PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi) beneficiaries was expected to save ₹90 billion in FY2024. Deleting 35 million bogus LPG connections could save ₹210 billion over two years, while eliminating 16 million fake ration cards may save nearly ₹100 billion annually.
- 3. Duplication of health data:** Childhood tuberculosis cases are recorded separately in the Health Management Information System, disease surveillance networks, and immunisation registries. This often leads to the same patient being counted multiple times.
- 4. Weak evidence-based policymaking:** Conflicting and unreliable data creates uncertainty among decision-makers. In many cases, policymakers begin relying more on anecdotal claims or political convenience instead of verified evidence.

5. **Administrative burden on Parliament:** MPs spend significant time asking for routine factual information. Better public access to standardised datasets could improve the quality of parliamentary accountability and discussions.

Economic and Global Competitiveness Concerns

1. **Weak performance in global indices:** In the Global Innovation Index 2024, India had missing data for two indicators and outdated information for eight indicators. Several datasets were more than a year old.
2. **Poor inter-agency coordination:** Inconsistent methodologies across departments reduce the reliability of national statistics. This weakens India's global data credibility and masks actual performance levels.
3. **Economic cost of poor data governance:** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated that better public-sector data sharing could increase GDP by nearly 1.5%, which may rise to 2.5% if private-sector data is also included.
4. **Loss of economic potential:** Weak data governance affects not only policymaking but also economic efficiency. Poor coordination and unreliable information reduce the benefits that strong digital governance can deliver.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening the India Data Management Office (IDMO):** Under the National Data Governance Framework Policy (NDGFP), the proposed IDMO can become the central institution for enforcing common standards, rules, and protocols across Ministries and States.
2. **Giving binding authority to IDMO:** The IDMO should have powers to audit compliance, resolve disputes, and enforce standard definitions and methodologies. Without enforcement powers, existing inefficiencies may continue.
3. **Aligning with global statistical frameworks:** India can improve consistency by adopting frameworks such as the UN's System of National Accounts. A National Statistical Standards Manual can help create uniform practices nationwide.
4. **Strengthening the national open data platform:** The open data platform "data.gov.in" should become a centralised and schema-consistent repository. Ministries should regularly upload standardised datasets to improve transparency and accessibility.
5. **Improving real-time public access:** Standardised district-level data can help parliamentarians, researchers, and policymakers access reliable information quickly. This can improve governance and reduce repetitive information requests.
6. **Using accountability benchmarks:** NITI Aayog's Data Governance Quality Index should become an annual benchmark linked with performance reviews and incentives. Competition among Ministries and States can improve data quality standards.

Conclusion

Data standardisation is not merely a technical issue but a basic requirement for effective governance. Fragmented and inconsistent databases weaken welfare delivery, policymaking, and economic efficiency. Strong standards, interoperable systems, and institutional accountability are necessary to make India's data

reliable and future-ready. For a country aspiring to become a \$5 trillion economy, future-ready governance must rest on accurate, accessible, and standardised information systems.

Question for practice:

Discuss the major challenges in India's data governance system and suggest measures needed to improve data standardisation and interoperability.

Source: The Hindu

Delhi's heat crisis and Measures to tackle it

Source: The post "Delhi's heat crisis and Measures to tackle it" has been created, based on "What measures are needed to address Delhi's heat crisis? | Explained" published in "The Hindu" on 11th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3- Environment

Context: Delhi and the NCR are facing longer and more intense heatwaves due to rapid urbanisation, shrinking green cover, excessive concretisation, and rising air-conditioning use. These factors have intensified the Urban Heat Island effect, turning the city into a "heat trap".

Reason why Delhi is retaining heat

1. Concrete, asphalt, steel, and glass absorb heat during the day and release it slowly at night, preventing cooling.
2. Roads, rooftops, and facades store heat, causing surface temperatures to rise to 50–60°C in dense areas.
3. Glass-heavy architecture in Gurgaon and Noida increases solar radiation indoors and raises dependence on air conditioning.
4. Vehicular activity on corridors such as NH-48 creates continuous heat hotspots through engines and exhaust emissions.
5. High-density construction and narrow streets restrict airflow and trap heat within the city.
6. Traditional cooling features such as courtyards, shaded pathways, and ventilation corridors have disappeared.
7. Loss of green cover, degraded wetlands, and destruction of Yamuna floodplains have weakened natural cooling through evapotranspiration.

How does cooling further increase warming:

1. Air conditioners release heat outdoors while cooling interiors, thereby increasing ambient temperatures by 1–2°C in dense neighbourhoods.
2. Rising temperatures increase cooling demand, creating a feedback loop of more energy use and more heat release.
3. Delhi's peak electricity demand has crossed 8,000 MW during summers due to high cooling requirements.
4. Increasing cooling demand also raises pressure on power systems and increases the risk of outages during extreme heat events.

Economic and ecological impacts

Economic impacts

1. Excessive heat reduces industrial and warehouse efficiency because machinery functions within temperature limits.
2. Productivity declines by 2–3% for every degree rise above optimal temperature levels.
3. Heat-related disruptions increase delays, operational costs, and supply chain inefficiencies.
4. Storage conditions deteriorate during extreme heat, affecting logistics and trade.
5. Delhi faces annual economic losses worth nearly \$100 billion due to declining heat-related productivity.

Ecological impacts

1. Shrinking green cover reduces natural cooling and increases urban temperatures.
2. Degraded wetlands and disappearing water bodies weaken ecological resilience.
3. Loss of Yamuna floodplains reduces moisture retention and heat regulation capacity.
4. Increased energy consumption raises emissions and worsens environmental degradation.

Measures needed to address the heat crisis

Structural and architectural measures

1. Buildings should adopt cool roofs, reflective coatings, and high-albedo materials to reduce heat absorption.
2. Passive cooling techniques such as shading, cross-ventilation, and insulation must be promoted.
3. Urban design should reintroduce courtyards, shaded pathways, and ventilation corridors.
4. Energy-efficient appliances and district cooling systems should be encouraged to reduce heat discharge.

Urban planning measures

1. Urban planning should preserve airflow through proper street orientation and ventilation corridors.
2. Expansion of urban forests, parks, wetlands, and water bodies is necessary for natural cooling.
3. Sustainable public transport and electric mobility should be promoted to reduce vehicular heat emissions.
4. Green and blue infrastructure should be treated as essential cooling systems in city planning.

Social protection measures

1. Affordable housing upgrades should be undertaken to improve thermal comfort for vulnerable groups.
2. Subsidised cooling facilities and community cooling centres should be developed during heatwaves.
3. Public awareness and heat action plans should be strengthened to protect urban populations.

Conclusion: Delhi's heat crisis is not only a climatic issue but also a structural and planning failure. A combination of climate-sensitive urban planning, sustainable infrastructure, ecological restoration, and social protection measures is essential to make the city resilient against extreme heat.

Question: What structural and urban planning measures are required to address Delhi's growing heat crisis? Discuss the economic and ecological impacts of urban heat accumulation.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Cost to access: On health check-up for workers

Source: The post “Cost to access: On health check-up for workers” has been created, based on “Cost to access” published in “The Hindu” on 11th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: The Union Labour Ministry has announced a free annual health check-up programme for workers aged 40 years and above through the Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC). The programme aims to improve occupational health and provide early detection of diseases among workers.

Positive Features of the Programme

1. Free annual health check-ups

- The government will provide free annual health check-ups to workers above 40 years of age.
- This step can help in the early identification and treatment of diseases.

2. Special focus on hazardous occupations

- Workers handling toxic chemicals or heavy machinery will undergo mandatory health check-ups.
- This can reduce occupational health risks and improve workplace safety.

3. Free treatment facilities

- ESIC hospitals and dispensaries will provide free treatment if any illness is detected during screening.
- This can reduce the financial burden on workers.

4. Legal support for workers’ health

- The programme is supported by laws such as the Factories Act 1948, the ESI Act 1948, and the OSH Code 2020.
- These laws aim to protect the health and safety of workers.

5. Availability of financial resources

- The programme will be financed through the well-funded ESI scheme.
- The government is also increasing the number of beds and doctors through PMJAY-empanelled facilities.

Challenges and Limitations

1. Limited coverage of workers

- Only around 31 crore out of 94 crore workers are registered on the e-Shram portal.
- Many workers may remain outside the benefits of the programme.

2. Problems faced by informal workers

- Women working as domestic workers or in home-based units often do not have formal employers.
- Such workers may not be able to access maternity and healthcare benefits.

3. Gender-related difficulties

- Women workers require specialised healthcare services and medical staff.
- Many ESIC camps remain overcrowded and are dominated by male workers.

4. High opportunity cost of healthcare

- Workers lose wages when they visit healthcare centres for check-ups.
- Referral to multiple centres for tests increases both time and expenses.

5. Inadequate recognition of occupational diseases

- Heat-related illnesses are not clearly recognised under the ESI Act.
- Construction and agricultural workers remain highly vulnerable to such diseases.

6. Neglect of infectious diseases

- Waste pickers and sanitation workers face diseases such as hepatitis and leptospirosis.
- The programme focuses mainly on screening and does not ensure preventive vaccination.

7. Weak healthcare infrastructure

- Many ESIC hospitals face shortages of doctors, beds, and medical facilities.
- This can reduce the effectiveness of the programme.

Measures Needed

1. Expand worker registration

- The government should increase registration on the e-Shram portal.
- Better integration between e-Shram and ESIC should be ensured.

2. Reduce opportunity costs

- Workers should receive compensation for the time spent on health check-ups.
- Mobile occupational health units should be provided near workplaces.

3. Improve healthcare access for women

- More female medical staff should be appointed in ESIC facilities.
- Separate and accessible healthcare services for women workers should be ensured.

4. Recognise more occupational diseases

- Heat-related illnesses and infectious diseases should be included under occupational disease coverage.
- Preventive vaccination should also be promoted.

5. Strengthen workplace healthcare delivery

- Healthcare services should be provided directly at workplaces as required under the OSH Code 2020.
- This can improve accessibility and participation among workers.

Conclusion: The ESIC annual health check-up programme is an important step towards improving workers' health and occupational safety in India. However, unless issues such as limited coverage, opportunity costs, poor infrastructure, and exclusion of informal workers are addressed, the programme may not significantly improve healthcare access for workers.

Question: Despite several legal provisions for workers' health in India, access to affordable and effective healthcare remains limited." Discuss in the context of the new ESIC annual health check-up programme.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Advancing India-South Korea Defence Innovation Ties

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International relations

Introduction

India and South Korea have steadily expanded their defence partnership since establishing diplomatic relations in 1973. Their cooperation has evolved from traditional defence agreements to joint defence manufacturing, technology partnerships, research collaboration, and industrial cooperation. The launch of the Korea-India Defence Accelerator (KIND-X) during the April 2026 summit marked a new phase in bilateral ties. The partnership now includes defence innovation, emerging technologies, supply chains, semiconductors, space cooperation, and strategic coordination in the Indo-Pacific region.

Evolution of India-South Korea Defence Cooperation

1. **Early Defence Agreements:** The 2005 MoU on Defence Industry and Logistics became the first major defence agreement between both countries. It promoted cooperation in defence production, research and development, and procurement.
2. **Expansion of Defence Cooperation in 2010:** Separate agreements on defence cooperation and defence research and development were signed in 2010. These agreements expanded training, joint exercises, expertise exchange, and cooperation in marine, electronics, and intelligent systems.
3. **Special Strategic Partnership:** In 2015, India and South Korea elevated their ties into a Special Strategic Partnership. This strengthened institutional defence engagement and widened cooperation in strategic sectors.
4. **2020 Defence Cooperation Roadmap:** The 2020 Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation expanded collaboration into land, naval, aero, and guided weapon systems. It also promoted investments and technology transfer in India's defence industrial corridors.

Launch of Korea-India Defence Accelerator (KIND-X)

1. **Establishment of KIND-X:** The Korea-India Defence Accelerator (KIND-X) was announced during the April 2026 summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung as part of the Joint Strategic Vision.
2. **Objective of the Platform:** KIND-X aims to connect defence industries, startups, incubators, investors, universities, research institutions, and innovators from both countries to create a joint defence innovation ecosystem.
3. **Modelled on Existing Innovation Platforms:** KIND-X follows the model of the **India-United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)** and **France-India Defence Startup Excellence (FRIND-X)**. It reflects India's growing focus on defence innovation partnerships.
4. **Institutional Framework:** The platform is expected to be led by South Korea's **Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA)** and **India's Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO)**. It will also support cooperation between South Korea's innovation enterprise system and **India's Innovations for Defence Excellence (IDEX)**.
5. **Alignment with Defence Cooperation Roadmap:** KIND-X is expected to support the goals of the **2020 Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation** between India and South Korea.

Potential Areas of Cooperation Under Korea-India Defence Accelerator (KIND-X)

1. **Joint Defence Research and Innovation:** KIND-X can expand defence research and development, innovation, co-development, and co-production involving startups, industries, universities, think tanks, and laboratories from both countries.
2. **Support for Defence Startups:** The **Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA)** and **Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO)** may introduce joint grants and innovation challenges for startups working on defence technologies.
3. **Testing, Certification, and Standardisation:** The platform can improve access to testing facilities through universities and laboratories. It may also support joint certification systems and standardisation processes for defence products.
4. **Technology Transfer and Industrial Cooperation:** KIND-X may organise workshops on export regulations, defence funding systems, intellectual property rights, licensing requirements, and technology transfer related to co-production and co-development.
5. **Annual Strategic and Industrial Summits:** Annual KIND-X summits may bring together defence ministries, industries, universities, think tanks, and academia from both countries to strengthen networking and review progress.
6. **Cooperation in Emerging Defence Technologies:** Potential areas include Artificial Intelligence-based military systems, autonomous weapons, robotics, satellites, intelligence and surveillance

systems, Space Situational Awareness (SSA), semiconductors, critical minerals, and defence manufacturing technologies.

Significance of India-South Korea Defence Cooperation

- 1. Deepening Strategic and Security Partnership:** Both countries agreed to deepen cooperation in defence, economic security, industrial development, and emerging technologies. They also supported a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.
- 2. Institutional Security Coordination:** India and South Korea agreed to strengthen defence dialogue mechanisms. This includes defence industry meetings, foreign policy and security dialogue, and a proposed 2+2 framework involving defence and foreign officials.
- 3. Expansion into Emerging Technologies:** The partnership now includes cooperation in Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, digital innovation, critical minerals, green hydrogen, and space technologies.
- 4. Maritime and Shipbuilding Cooperation:** A comprehensive framework was adopted for cooperation in shipbuilding, shipping, and maritime logistics. Korean companies also increased collaboration in Indian port development and shipyard infrastructure.
- 5. Strengthening Defence Industrial Ecosystems:** KIND-X seeks to connect South Korean innovation hubs like Changwon, Daejeon, and Gumi with India's defence corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Aerospace hubs in Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad are also part of this linkage.
- 6. Role of Major Companies:** Major firms like Hyundai, Hanwha, Samsung, LG, Tata Advanced Systems, Mahindra, Bharat Forge, POSCO, and L&T are expected to strengthen industrial cooperation. Their participation can expand investment and technology partnerships.

Strategic and Geopolitical Importance

- 1. Diversification of India's Defence Supply Chains:** India is using defence cooperation with South Korea to reduce dependence on Russian defence platforms and strengthen alternative military supply chains through localisation and technology transfer.
- 2. Expansion of Air Defence Cooperation:** India and South Korea agreed to extend the K9 Vajra joint production model into air defence systems. India is also reconsidering localisation of the K30 Biho anti-aircraft system.
- 3. Growth of Defence Exports and UAV Sector:** India is rapidly expanding its drone manufacturing sector. South Korea and other Indo-Pacific partners view India as an alternative production hub for affordable UAV systems.
- 4. Emergence of an Alternative Defence Production Hub:** India and South Korea are jointly developing defence manufacturing and localisation systems that can provide alternatives to Russian and Chinese defence platforms in mid-tier global markets.

5. **Strategic Alignment in the Indo-Pacific:** Closer India–South Korea cooperation is strengthening coordination in the Indo-Pacific region and improving interoperability with systems used by the United States, Japan, and European partners.

Major Challenges In India–South Korea Defence Cooperation

1. **Institutional and Funding Clarity:** The success of KIND-X depends on clear steering mechanisms, funding structures, and defined areas of joint innovation. Both defence ministries must create practical and measurable deliverables.
2. **Technology Transfer and Regulatory Issues:** Co-development and co-production require solutions related to export control rules, intellectual property rights, licensing systems, and defence production financing mechanisms.
3. **Long-Term Industrial Coordination:** Deep defence industrial integration requires continuous coordination among governments, industries, startups, universities, and research institutions from both countries.
4. **Dependence on Implementation Capacity:** Many agreements and frameworks have been announced, but their success depends on timely execution, industrial participation, and sustained policy support from both sides.
5. **Supply Chain and Production Integration Challenges:** Expanding joint manufacturing and localisation requires smooth integration of supply chains, production systems, testing standards, and certification processes between both countries.
6. **Strategic and Regional Pressures:** Growing defence cooperation may increase regional strategic tensions, especially due to expanding interoperability with systems linked to the United States and Indo-Pacific security frameworks.

Conclusion

India–South Korea defence ties are steadily moving toward deeper strategic and technological cooperation. KIND-X can strengthen defence innovation, localisation, co-production, and emerging technology partnerships between both countries. Its long-term success will depend on effective implementation, institutional coordination, technology transfer mechanisms, and sustained industrial collaboration, which can further strengthen strategic cooperation and defence manufacturing capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of the Korea-India Defence Accelerator (KIND-X) in strengthening India–South Korea defence cooperation and emerging technology partnerships.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Governor's Role in the Government Formation

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Indian Polity

Introduction

The Governor plays an important constitutional role in government formation after Assembly elections. This role becomes sensitive when no party secures a clear majority. The Tamil Nadu Assembly elections of 2026 again raised debates over the Governor's discretionary powers and the process of inviting parties to form the government. The elections also renewed discussions on the constitutional principle that majority support must be tested on the floor of the House.

Constitutional Provisions and Conventions

Appointment of Chief Minister: Article 164(1) states that the Governor appoints the Chief Minister, while other ministers are appointed on the advice of the Chief Minister. When one party gets a clear majority, the Governor invites its leader to form the government.

Governor's Discretion in Hung Assembly: If no party secures majority support, the Governor uses discretionary powers to appoint the Chief Minister. The Constitution does not provide fixed criteria for this situation.

Commission Recommendations: The Sarkaria Commission (1987), Venkatachaliah Commission (2002), and Punchhi Commission (2010) suggested an order of preference for government formation. Priority should go to a pre-poll alliance with majority, followed by the single largest party with support, then post-poll coalitions.

Floor Test: Parliamentary democracy does not require a Chief Minister-designate to prove majority through signed letters before taking oath. The floor of the House remains the proper constitutional forum for testing majority support.

Purpose of Discretionary Powers: The Governor's discretion exists to ensure the formation of a stable government that can enjoy majority support in the Assembly. The Governor is expected to function as an impartial constitutional authority.

Issues in the Governor's Discretionary Powers

Uneven Standards: Governors have often followed different approaches in similar political situations. This has created uncertainty in constitutional practice regarding government formation in hung Assemblies.

Goa-Manipur Cases: In Goa and Manipur in 2017, Governors invited BJP-led post-poll alliances to form governments even though the Congress emerged as the single largest party. These governments later proved majority on the floor of the House.

Karnataka-Maharashtra Cases: In Karnataka in 2018, the Governor invited the BJP as the single largest party despite a post-poll alliance claiming majority support. In Maharashtra in 2019, a BJP-led coalition was sworn in despite uncertainty regarding majority numbers.

Tamil Nadu Issue: In Tamil Nadu, the Governor demanded signed letters from 118 MLAs before inviting TVK leader C. Joseph Vijay to form the government. Critics argued that the Constitution does not require proof of an absolute majority before swearing-in.

Early Floor Test: The direction to prove majority within a short period raised concerns regarding horse-trading and defections. Such actions may weaken democratic stability and encourage resort politics.

Partisanship Concerns: Different approaches adopted in different States raised concerns regarding the impartiality of Governors. This strengthened criticism that Governors sometimes function more in line with the Union government rather than as neutral constitutional heads of States.

Minority Governments and Parliamentary Practice

Past Examples: Minority governments have existed many times in India's parliamentary system. Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1996, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral, and Manmohan Singh led governments dependent on outside support.

Parliamentary Convention: Parliamentary practice recognises minority governments as constitutionally valid arrangements. Such governments continue in office as long as they retain the confidence of the House.

No-Confidence Principle: Article 164(2) supports the principle of collective responsibility to the Assembly. A government remains in office until it loses majority support through a no-confidence motion on the floor of the House.

Judicial Interpretation and Constitutional Principles

Bommai Judgment: In *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that majority support must be tested on the floor of the House. The Court treated the Assembly as the proper constitutional forum for deciding majority.

Rameshwar Prasad: In the *Rameshwar Prasad* case (2006), the Supreme Court again supported floor testing instead of subjective political assessments outside the Assembly.

Karnataka Ruling: During the Karnataka political crisis of 2018, the Governor gave 15 days for majority testing. The Supreme Court reduced this period to one day after observing that long delays could encourage engineered defections and political manipulation.

Limits on Discretion: Judicial pronouncements repeatedly emphasised that the Governor's role is to identify the person most likely to command confidence in the Assembly. The Governor is not expected to impose conditions beyond constitutional requirements.

Need for Clarity: Different judicial interpretations in various cases have resulted in inconsistent application of principles relating to gubernatorial discretion. This strengthened the demand for clearer constitutional norms and conventions.

Way Forward

Commission Recommendations: Governors should follow the order of preference suggested by the Sarkaria Commission, Venkatachaliah Commission, and Punchhi Commission while inviting parties to form governments. This can bring consistency and reduce political controversies in hung Assemblies.

Codification of Governor's Discretionary Powers: The Justice Kurian Joseph Committee recommended adding a new constitutional schedule to define the Governor's discretionary powers. This can provide a clear constitutional basis for such decisions.

Strengthening the Floor Test Principle: Majority support should be tested only on the floor of the House through confidence or no-confidence motions. Pre-swearing demands for proof of majority should be avoided.

Respecting Parliamentary Conventions: Newly formed governments should be allowed to prove their majority in the normal course of Assembly proceedings. Unnecessary deadlines for confidence votes may encourage horse-trading and defections.

Need for Impartial Conduct: Governors must exercise discretionary powers in a bona fide and neutral manner. Constitutional morality and respect for the voter's mandate should guide the process of government formation.

Conclusion

The Governor's role in government formation is important for parliamentary democracy and federal balance. However, inconsistent use of discretionary powers has repeatedly created constitutional controversies in hung Assemblies. The floor of the House must remain the final test of majority support. Clear constitutional conventions, impartial conduct by Governors, and respect for democratic mandate are necessary to ensure stable, accountable, and constitutionally consistent government formation in the States.

Question for practice:

Discuss the constitutional role of the Governor in government formation during a hung Assembly and the controversies related to the use of discretionary powers.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Transforming Financial security through Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

Source: The post "Transforming Financial security through Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana" has been created, based on "PMJJBY: The silent social security revolution" published in "BusinessLine" on 12th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Indian Economy

Context: Banking and insurance are important pillars of economic stability and financial security. India's financial inclusion journey began with the launch of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana in 2014 to provide banking access to the poor and rural population. To strengthen social security, the Government launched the Jan Suraksha trinity in 2015 consisting of Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana. PMJJBY has emerged as a major instrument of low-cost life insurance and financial protection for economically weaker sections.

Features of PMJJBY

1. PMJJBY is a one-year term life insurance scheme providing life cover of ₹2 lakh.

2. It is available to bank account holders in the age group of 18–50 years.
3. The insurance cover is available for death due to any cause, including natural and accidental death.
4. There are no exclusions based on pre-existing diseases.
5. No medical examination is required for enrolment.
6. No separate KYC is needed because subscriber details are already available with banks.
7. The annual premium is only ₹436, which is nearly ₹1.20 per day.
8. Subscribers can continue the scheme till the age of 55 through regular renewals.
9. Premium is auto-debited annually from the subscriber's bank account, ensuring continuity of coverage.
10. Pro-rata premium structure allows enrolment throughout the year, making the scheme more accessible.

Significance of PMJJBY as a Social Security Revolution

1. Expansion of Financial Inclusion

- a. The scheme integrates banking with insurance, thereby deepening financial inclusion.
- b. It brings economically weaker sections into the formal financial system.
- c. It uses the existing banking infrastructure to deliver insurance efficiently.

2. Affordable Insurance for the Poor

- a. The extremely low premium makes insurance accessible to daily wage earners and low-income families.
- b. It addresses the earlier gap where affordable insurance products were unavailable for poor households.

3. Protection Against Financial Distress

- a. The ₹2 lakh life cover provides immediate financial support to families after the death of the earning member.
- b. The amount can help families pay school fees, clear debts, or meet basic livelihood needs.
- c. It prevents vulnerable households from falling into extreme poverty after a crisis.

4. Simplified and Inclusive Design

- a. Minimal paperwork and absence of medical examination encourage wider participation.
- b. Automatic premium deduction reduces chances of policy lapse due to non-payment.
- c. The scheme is especially useful for rural and less literate populations.

5. Efficient Claim Settlement

- a. Claims are processed through banks linked with partner insurance companies.
- b. The claim amount is directly transferred to the nominee's bank account.
- c. The scheme has achieved a claim settlement ratio of 99.95 per cent, ensuring trust and credibility.

6. Large Scale Social Impact

- a. PMJJBY has cumulatively enrolled 27.43 crore individuals.

- b. Around 8.8 lakh claims have been settled.
- c. ₹17,600 crore has been disbursed to families of deceased subscribers.
- d. These figures indicate the large-scale social protection provided by the scheme.

7. Role of LIC

- a. Life Insurance Corporation of India plays a central role in implementation.
- b. LIC has tie-ups with 808 banks across the country.
- c. It has enrolled 21.49 crore subscribers cumulatively under PMJJBY.
- d. LIC has paid 4.70 lakh claims amounting to ₹9,414 crore.

Challenges and Concerns

- 1. Awareness Gap:** Many families remain unaware that the deceased subscriber was enrolled under PMJJBY. Lack of awareness reduces effective utilisation of benefits.
- 2. Absence of Physical Policy Document:** No physical insurance policy is issued under the scheme. Families may face difficulties in identifying coverage details after the subscriber's death.
- 3. Nominee-related Issues:** In cases where nominees are not registered, legal procedures become necessary. This can delay settlement and create hardship for families.
- 4. Initial Lien Period:** Non-accidental deaths are not covered during the first 30 days of enrolment for new or rejoining subscribers. This condition may reduce immediate protection.
- 5. Need for Better Rural Outreach:** Greater coordination among banks, business correspondents, and district administration is required to improve awareness in rural areas.

Way Forward

1. Increase Awareness and Financial Literacy

- a. Banks, insurance companies, and local administration should conduct awareness campaigns in rural and semi-urban areas.
- b. Business correspondents and self-help groups can be used to spread information about the scheme.
- c. Families should be informed about enrolment status and claim procedures.

2. Strengthen Nominee Registration

- a. Proper nominee details should be mandatorily updated at the time of enrolment.
- b. Regular verification of nominee information can reduce legal disputes and delays in claim settlement.

3. Provide Digital and Physical Confirmation

- a. SMS alerts, digital certificates, and simple policy acknowledgements should be provided to subscribers.
- b. This will help family members identify coverage in case of death of the subscriber.

4. Improve Last-Mile Delivery

- a. Greater coordination among banks, panchayats, district administration, and insurance providers is needed.
- b. Rural outreach through camps and village-level drives can improve penetration.

5. Enhance Integration with Other Welfare Schemes

- a. PMJJBY can be integrated with Jan Dhan accounts, pension schemes, and social welfare databases for better coverage and tracking.
- b. A unified social security platform can improve efficiency and accessibility.

6. Ensure Continuity of Coverage

- a. Banks should send periodic reminders regarding sufficient account balance before auto-debit dates.
- b. This will reduce unintended policy lapses among low-income subscribers.

7. Expand Social Security Coverage

- a. The government can gradually enhance insurance coverage and widen eligibility criteria in line with inflation and changing economic needs.
- b. Continuous expansion will support the goal of "Insurance for All by 2047".

Conclusion: PMJJBY is an important step towards inclusive social security and financial protection for vulnerable households. Its affordable premium, simple design, and wide reach have strengthened financial inclusion in India. Improving awareness and last-mile delivery will further support the goal of "Insurance for All by 2047".

Question: "Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) represents a silent social security revolution in India." Discuss its significance in advancing financial inclusion and social protection for vulnerable households.

Source: [BusinessLine](#)

Addressing India's electrical fire risks

Source: The post "Addressing India's electrical fire risks" has been created, based on "Addressing India's electrical fire risks" published in "The Hindu" on 13th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: Electrical fires are emerging as a major urban safety challenge in India due to rising electricity demand, rapid urbanisation, and ageing electrical infrastructure. The Vivek Vihar fire incident in Delhi in May 2026, which caused multiple deaths, highlighted the growing dangers associated with electrical faults and overloaded systems. Increasing use of air-conditioners and high-power appliances has further intensified pressure on residential electrical systems.

Rising Electrical Fire Risks in India

1. Delhi Fire Service attributes over 80 per cent of fires in the capital to electrical faults.

2. Mumbai Fire Brigade analysis also attributes nearly three-fourths of fire incidents to electrical causes.
3. NCRB data recorded 7,566 fire accident deaths in 2022, with electrical short circuits emerging as one of the largest causes.
4. India recorded a peak electricity demand of 256 GW in April 2026 due to extreme heat conditions.
5. Rapid growth in air-conditioner usage is increasing household electrical load significantly.
6. The International Energy Agency estimates that AC units in India may rise from 93 million in 2024 to around 240 million by 2030.

Causes of Electrical Fires

1. Ageing Electrical Infrastructure

- a. Many houses still use decades-old wiring systems not designed for modern electrical loads.
- b. Older buildings often have low-quality installation systems and poor maintenance.
- c. Existing wiring systems are unable to safely handle appliances such as ACs, geysers, EV chargers, and induction stoves.

2. Overloading Due to Air-conditioners

- a. Air-conditioners are among the heaviest electrical loads in households.
- b. Simultaneous usage during heatwaves sharply increases electricity demand.
- c. ACs are often connected to circuits shared with other heavy appliances, increasing overheating risks.

3. Faulty Electrical Components

- a. Counterfeit wires, low-quality breakers, and poor switchboards increase chances of short circuits.
- b. Loose or oxidised electrical connections generate excessive heat.
- c. Parallel and series arc faults can trigger fires before standard breakers trip.

4. Harmonics and Power Quality Issues

- a. Modern appliances such as LED drivers, inverter systems, EV chargers, and variable-frequency devices generate harmonic distortions.
- b. These distortions increase heating in neutral conductors and wiring systems.
- c. Poor earthing and loose joints further increase ignition risks.

5. Weak Inspection and Maintenance Systems

- a. India lacks periodic mandatory inspection of residential electrical installations.
- b. Preventive maintenance practices remain weak, especially in older residential buildings.
- c. Thermal scans and professional safety audits are rarely conducted.

6. Inadequate Forensic Investigation

- a. India faces a shortage of trained fire-forensic experts and electrical investigators.
- b. Lack of detailed root-cause analysis limits institutional learning from major fire incidents.

Lessons for India's Electrical Safety Framework

1. Strengthening Safety Standards: India has already published standards such as IS 302-3 (National Electrical Code) and NBC 2016 Part 4. However, implementation and enforcement remain weak.

2. Adoption of Advanced Protection Systems: Arc Fault Detection Devices (AFDDs) can identify dangerous arc faults before fires occur. Such systems are widely used in advanced economies but remain largely absent in Indian homes.

3. Importance of Preventive Inspection: Countries like Japan and South Korea mandate periodic inspection of electrical installations. Similar models can improve early identification of safety hazards in India.

4. Need for Consumer Awareness: Consumers should insist on ISI-marked wiring, breakers, and stabilisers. Immediate attention should be given to flickering lights, burning smells, and overheating sockets. Regular servicing of ACs and thermographic scans can reduce fire risks.

Way Forward

1. Mandatory Periodic Safety Audits

- a. Periodic inspection of residential and commercial electrical systems should be made compulsory.
- b. Older buildings must undergo special electrical safety certification.

2. Upgrading Electrical Infrastructure

- a. Ageing wiring and overloaded circuits should be replaced with modern fire-resistant systems.
- b. Dedicated circuits should be installed for high-load appliances such as ACs and EV chargers.

3. Adoption of Advanced Technologies

- a. Arc Fault Detection Devices and harmonic monitoring systems should be promoted.
- b. Smart electrical monitoring systems can help detect overheating and abnormal current patterns.

4. Stronger Regulation and Enforcement

- a. Strict enforcement of National Electrical Code standards is necessary.
- b. Use of counterfeit electrical products should be curbed through stronger market surveillance.

5. Capacity Building in Fire Forensics

- a. India should develop specialised electrical fire forensic units.
- b. Better investigation mechanisms will improve accountability and policy response.

6. Public Awareness and Training

- a. Awareness campaigns should educate citizens on safe electrical practices.
- b. Resident Welfare Associations and local bodies should conduct regular safety drives.

7. Integration with Urban Planning

- a. Electrical safety should be integrated into urban housing policies and building approvals.

- b. Fire safety compliance should become mandatory for residential and commercial complexes.

Conclusion: Rising electricity demand and ageing infrastructure have significantly increased electrical fire risks in India. Strengthening safety standards, improving inspections, and modernising electrical systems are essential to prevent future tragedies. A preventive and technology-driven electrical safety framework is necessary for safer urbanisation and sustainable growth.

Question: “Rising electricity consumption, ageing infrastructure, and poor electrical safety standards have increased the risk of electrical fires in India.” Examine the causes of electrical fires and suggest measures to improve electrical safety in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

A New Start Against Noise Pollution

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- environmental pollution and degradation

Introduction

Noise pollution has become one of the most neglected environmental and public health challenges in India. Political celebrations, sports events, traffic, loudspeakers, and construction activities have normalized high sound levels in public life. Continuous exposure to excessive noise affects hearing, sleep, mental health, and overall well-being. Despite legal regulations and prescribed limits, enforcement remains weak and public awareness remains limited. Growing tolerance toward excessive public sound has made noise pollution a serious concern across Indian cities and towns.

What is Noise Pollution?

Noise pollution is the presence of unwanted or excessive sound that can have adverse effects on human health and well-being. It can be caused by a variety of sources, including:

Transportation: Cars, trucks, airplanes, and other vehicles can all generate significant noise pollution.

Industrial activities: Factories, construction sites, and other industrial activities can also produce loud noises.

Recreational activities: Loud music, sporting events, and other recreational activities can also contribute to noise pollution.

Natural sources: Natural sources of noise pollution include wind, rain, and thunder.

Noise Pollution as a Public Health Crisis

1. **Excessive Sound Beyond Safe Limits:** A single pea whistle can generate 104–116 decibels of sound, while sustained exposure beyond 85 decibels can damage hearing. Large public gatherings using whistles and loudspeakers create harmful sound pressure for long periods.

2. **Hearing Loss and Occupational Risks:** The World Health Organization (WHO) attributed 16% of disabling hearing loss in adults to occupational noise. India has around 6.3 crore people with some degree of impaired hearing.
3. **Impact on Workers and Poor Communities:** Studies showed hearing impairment ranging from 13% among construction workers in Puducherry to 49% in industrial workers. Poor families often live and work in highly noisy conditions without protection.
4. **Effects on Physical and Mental Health:** Loud sounds disturb sleep, increase cortisol levels, and cause endothelial dysfunction. Noise also affects the cognition and learning ability of children living near busy roads and airports.
5. **Global Health Burden of Noise:** The European Environment Agency ranked noise as the second-largest environmental cause of disability-adjusted life years lost after air pollution. A WHO synthesis estimated around 16 lakh healthy life years lost annually in Western Europe due to traffic noise alone.

Growing Noise Pollution in India

1. **Public Celebrations and Loud Gatherings:** Political rallies, victory celebrations, religious events, and sports gatherings increasingly use loud whistles and sound systems. Public sound has become a common form of political and social expression.
2. **Widespread Breach of Noise Limits:** Data from the National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network (NANMN) showed that more than 80% of monitoring stations crossed prescribed noise limits during both day and night in 2019.
3. **Situation in Chennai and Other Cities:** All 10 monitoring stations in Chennai crossed the residential nighttime limit of 45 decibels. A 2022 UNEP report cited Moradabad as having the world's second-highest recorded noise level, though the ranking was contested by government officials.
4. **Weak Monitoring Infrastructure:** The NANMN has only 70 monitoring stations across seven metros and has not expanded meaningfully in 14 years. Many district towns and smaller urban centres remain outside regular monitoring systems.
5. **Urban Conditions Worsening the Crisis:** Dense settlements, poor building acoustics, weak civic infrastructure, and unchecked construction activities increase noise exposure. In many towns, construction work and loudspeaker use continue even during the night.

Legal Framework

1. **Noise Pollution Rules, 2000:** The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 were framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The rules aim to protect public health and the environment from excessive noise.
2. **Ambient Noise Standards:** Separate noise limits are prescribed for residential, commercial, industrial, and silence zones. Different standards exist for daytime and nighttime sound levels.

3. **Protection of Silence Zones:** Areas near hospitals, schools, courts, and religious places are treated as silence zones. Strict controls are placed on loud sound and public noise in these areas.
4. **Regulation of Noise-Generating Activities:** The rules regulate construction work, industrial activities, vehicles, loudspeakers, and public gatherings. Noise-generating activities are required to remain within prescribed limits.
5. **Penalties and Enforcement Agencies:** Violations can attract fines, imprisonment, or both. State pollution control boards and committees are responsible for monitoring and enforcing the rules.

Challenges in Enforcement

1. **Weak Implementation of Existing Rules:** The Noise Pollution Rules provide legal standards, but enforcement remains poor in many regions. Monitoring systems and enforcement agencies often lack adequate resources.
2. **Political Reluctance and Public Pressure:** Political parties hesitate to control loud public celebrations because restrictions may be seen as opposition to cultural or religious practices. This weakens strict enforcement during festivals and rallies.
3. **Misuse of Festival Exemptions:** State governments can permit loudspeaker use between 10 pm and midnight for up to 15 festive days in a year. However, public events frequently exceed permitted decibel limits even during allowed periods.
4. **Low Public Awareness:** Noise pollution is still treated as a minor inconvenience rather than a health issue. Awareness about hearing loss, stress, and sleep disorders caused by noise remains limited.
5. **Poor Protection for Vulnerable Groups:** Workers, children, patients, and low-income families face the highest exposure to harmful noise. Weak occupational safety enforcement leaves many people unprotected.

Way Forward

1. **Stronger Enforcement and Monitoring:** Noise rules require stricter implementation through better monitoring systems and regular inspections. Expanding monitoring stations beyond major metros is necessary.
2. **Responsible Public and Political Behaviour:** Political parties, religious groups, and public organisations should encourage celebrations within prescribed noise limits. Public events should respect the right of people to sleep, work, and live peacefully.
3. **Better Urban and Occupational Planning:** Cities require improved building acoustics and stricter control over nighttime construction activities. Workers exposed to high noise levels should receive stronger occupational protection.

4. **Greater Public Awareness:** Awareness campaigns can help people understand the health impacts of excessive noise. Noise pollution should be treated as seriously as air pollution and other environmental problems.

Conclusion

Noise pollution has become one of the most tolerated forms of environmental degradation in India. Its impact extends beyond irritation to hearing loss, stress, sleep disorders, and declining quality of life. India already has legal rules to regulate noise, but weak enforcement and public acceptance continue to undermine them. A meaningful change requires stricter implementation, responsible public behaviour, and greater awareness about the right to peaceful and healthy living spaces.

Question for practice:

Discuss the growing challenge of noise pollution in India and examine its impact on public health, governance, and quality of life.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

How India is Governing Its Water Resources

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 1- location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps)

Introduction

India's water crisis is not only about scarcity but also about weak governance and poor management. The country receives nearly **4,000 billion cubic metres of annual rainfall**, yet only a small share becomes usable. Rising water stress, falling groundwater levels, and uneven water distribution have made water governance a major policy challenge. As India moves toward **SDG 6** and the goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047, improving water governance has become essential for economic growth, sustainability, and social well-being.

India's Water Paradox and Growing Stress

1. **High Rainfall but Low Usable Water:** India receives large annual rainfall, but only about 1,100 billion cubic metres is considered usable. Limited storage infrastructure, uneven rainfall distribution, and ecological constraints reduce effective water use.
2. **Population Pressure on Water Resources:** India supports nearly 18% of the world's population but has access to only around 4% of global freshwater resources.
3. **Rising Water Stress:** According to the NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index, nearly 600 million people face high to extreme water stress.
4. **Declining Per Capita Water Availability:** Per capita water availability was above 5,000 cubic metres annually after independence. It has now declined to nearly 1,400 cubic metres, showing growing pressure on water resources.
5. **Heavy Dependence on Groundwater:** India is the world's largest groundwater user and accounts for almost one-fourth of global groundwater extraction. Excessive extraction has caused falling groundwater levels in many areas.

- 6. Institutional Nature of the Crisis:** India's water crisis is not only hydrological but also institutional. Weak regulation, fragmented governance, and poor coordination have increased water stress despite substantial rainfall.

Institutional Framework of Water Governance in India

1. Constitutional Distribution of Powers:

State List : Water is mainly a State subject under Entry 17 of the State List.

Union List: The Union government regulates inter-state rivers under Entry 56 of the Union List.

Article 262 allows Parliament to resolve inter-state water disputes.

2. Role of the Ministry of Jal Shakti: The Ministry of Jal Shakti is the main authority for water resources, drinking water supply, and sanitation. It coordinates national water-related programmes and policies.

3. Central Technical Institutions: The Central Water Commission manages surface water planning, river basin development, and flood control. The Central Ground Water Board studies groundwater resources and supports sustainable aquifer management.

4. Accountability Through NITI Aayog: NITI Aayog evaluates State performance through the Composite Water Management Index. This has encouraged evidence-based policymaking and accountability in the water sector.

5. Role of States and Local Bodies: States mainly handle irrigation, groundwater regulation, and water supply. Panchayats, municipalities, urban water boards, and local governments implement policies at the ground level.

Specialized and Regulatory Institutions: The National Water Development Agency (NWDA) works on river interlinking projects. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards monitor environmental and pollution-related water issues.

Key Water Legislations: Important laws include the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, the River Boards Act, 1956, and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. These laws regulate river disputes, river management, and water pollution control.

Policy Guidelines for Water Governance: The National Water Policy, 2012 promotes integrated water resource management and treats water as an economic resource. It also emphasizes sustainability, efficiency, and better water management practices.

Key Challenges in Water Governance

- 1. Fragmented Institutional Structure:** Water governance is divided among different ministries, departments, and agencies. This often leads to poor coordination and policy conflicts.
- 2. Engineering-Centric Water Management:** Water policies have mainly focused on dams, canals, and irrigation infrastructure. Demand management and ecological sustainability have received less attention.

3. **Water-Intensive Agricultural Policies:** Policies encouraging crops such as rice and wheat have increased groundwater extraction. Agriculture consumes the largest share of India's freshwater resources.
4. **Weak Water Data Systems:** India lacks reliable and accessible water data. Poor monitoring affects planning, allocation, and regulation of water resources.
5. **Neglect of Ecosystem-Based Management:** Water governance often ignores the relationship between rivers, wetlands, land, and ecosystems. Environmental flows are neglected, causing ecological degradation.
6. **Limited Demand-Side Management:** Water policies mainly focus on increasing supply instead of improving efficiency, conservation, and rational water use practices.

Major Government Initiatives for Water Governance

1. **Jal Jeevan Mission:** Launched in 2019, the mission aims to provide tap water connections to every rural household. It has been extended till 2028 to achieve universal coverage.
2. **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** The programme focuses on sustainable groundwater management in water-stressed areas. It promotes community participation, groundwater budgeting, and monitoring.
3. **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana:** The scheme promotes micro-irrigation and efficient water management practices. Improving irrigation efficiency is important because agriculture uses most freshwater resources.
4. **Jal Shakti Abhiyan:** Started in 2019, the campaign focuses on water conservation and groundwater recharge in water-stressed districts.
5. **AMRUT and AMRUT 2.0:** The mission aims to improve urban water supply, sewage treatment, wastewater reuse, green spaces, and water security in cities and Urban Local Bodies.
6. **Namami Gange Programme:** The programme combines pollution control, sewage treatment, and ecological restoration in the Ganga basin to improve river health.
7. **Amrit Sarovar Mission:** The mission aims to develop and rejuvenate 75 water bodies in every district for local water conservation and recharge.
8. **National Aquifer Mapping Programme (NAQUIM):** NAQUIM helps identify and understand aquifers for better groundwater management and sustainable use.

Way Forward for Sustainable Water Governance

1. **Shift Towards Integrated Governance:** India needs to move from fragmented governance to a coordinated and comprehensive water management framework. Water should be treated as a shared and finite resource.

2. **Focus on Sustainability and Efficiency:** Water governance should focus more on conservation, efficiency, and equitable use instead of only increasing supply.
3. **Expand Wastewater Recycling:** Increasing wastewater reuse in cities can reduce pressure on freshwater resources and improve long-term water availability.
4. **Improve Irrigation and Crop Choices:** Better irrigation systems and suitable crop patterns can improve water productivity and reduce groundwater stress.
5. **Strengthen Participatory Governance:** Community participation in groundwater management and monitoring can improve accountability and sustainable use of water resources.
6. **Use Scientific and Technological Approaches:** Better data systems, scientific planning, and technological innovation are necessary for effective and sustainable water governance.

Conclusion

India's water future depends more on governance than on rainfall availability. Strong institutions, better coordination, efficient water use, and community participation are necessary to address rising water stress. Scientific planning, sustainable management, wastewater reuse, and integrated governance can help India move from a cycle of scarcity toward long-term water security, ecological sustainability, and balanced economic development while supporting SDG 6 and national development goals.

Question for practice:

Examine how weak governance and institutional challenges have contributed to India's water crisis despite substantial annual rainfall.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Managing Coexistence in Human-Wildlife Conflict Zones

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Conservation

Introduction

Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is a growing socio-ecological challenge linked with habitat loss, land-use change, livelihood pressure and ecological imbalance. Rising interactions between humans and wildlife are affecting human safety, livelihoods, food security and biodiversity across India, Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. The issue is no longer limited to wildlife conservation alone. It has become a social, economic and developmental concern that requires coexistence-based approaches combining ecological protection, community participation and sustainable land-use planning.

Human-Wildlife Conflict

1. **Meaning and Nature of Conflict:** Human-wildlife conflict occurs when wildlife threatens human safety, crops, livestock, property or livelihoods, leading to retaliation against animals. It is not only a conservation issue but also a social, economic and humanitarian challenge.

2. **Global Spread of the Problem:** The problem has become more frequent, intense and widespread across continents. South and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa face severe conflict involving elephants, big cats and other large mammals.
3. **Threat to Wildlife Survival:** Defensive and retaliatory killing is pushing several species towards decline and possible extinction. Elephants, tigers, carnivores, primates, deer, crocodiles and rhinos are among the affected species.
4. **Human-Wildlife Conflict as Human-Human Conflict:** Conflicts often involve different stakeholder groups with competing interests and needs. Cultural, political and economic factors make these conflicts highly complex and difficult to resolve.

Major Causes Behind Rising Human-Wildlife Conflict

1. **Habitat Loss and Fragmentation:** Forests are being cleared for agriculture, roads and settlements. This disrupts natural movement corridors and pushes wildlife into farms and peri-urban areas.
2. **Growing Competition for Resources:** Rising human population and increasing demand for land, food and water have increased competition between humans and wildlife. Wildlife increasingly enters human areas in search of food and shelter.
3. **Ecological Imbalance and Prey Decline:** Crop raiding and livestock predation are adaptive responses to ecological stress. Predators attack livestock when natural prey declines, while elephants, monkeys and wild boars exploit food near forest edges.
4. **Climate Change and Resource Stress:** Climate change may intensify conflict by changing the availability of food, water and habitat resources. Both wildlife and humans are forced to adapt to shrinking ecological space.
5. **Expanding Wildlife Populations in Some Areas:** Successful species recovery in some regions has also created new conflicts. Carnivores expanding their range have increased encounters with human settlements and livestock areas.

Impacts of Rising Human-Wildlife Conflict

1. **Loss of Human Life and Livelihoods:** In India, hundreds of people die annually in elephant encounters, while livestock losses are common due to predators. Farmers, herders and artisanal fishers face serious economic losses and safety risks.
2. **Unequal Burden on Poor Communities:** The costs of living with wildlife fall heavily on communities with low incomes and limited economic opportunities. These communities often bear conservation costs.
3. **Impact on Food Security and Economy:** Human-wildlife conflict affects agricultural production, food security and supply chains. Reduced productivity among producers creates indirect impacts on the wider economy.

4. **Ecological and Conservation Consequences:** Retaliatory killings reduce wildlife populations and threaten biodiversity conservation. Poorly managed conflict also weakens long-term conservation goals and coexistence efforts.
5. **Social and Governance Challenges:** Temporary or piecemeal solutions often increase tensions between communities and conservation authorities. Lack of coordination between sectors weakens effective conflict management.

Global Approaches Towards Coexistence

1. **Community-Based Conservation Models:** Botswana and Namibia involve local communities in wildlife management and tourism revenue sharing. Economic incentives reduce hostility towards wildlife and strengthen conservation support.
2. **Ecological Planning and Connectivity:** Costa Rica integrates ecological corridors into national planning. Maintaining habitat connectivity helps reduce wildlife movement into human settlements.
3. **Monitoring and Compensation Systems:** Finland combines real-time wildlife monitoring with rapid compensation mechanisms. This reduces both economic losses and resentment among affected communities.
4. **Common Features of Successful Models:** Effective models rely on strong community participation, reliable economic support and ecological planning. These approaches treat conflict as a shared management challenge rather than a law-and-order issue.

The Indian Scenario: Challenges and Scope for Improvement

1. **Existing Measures in India:** India has adopted compensation schemes, solar fencing, early-warning systems and legal frameworks for wildlife conservation. These measures have shown limited but context-specific success.
2. **Gaps in Implementation:** Compensation systems often suffer from delays, weak coverage and poor accessibility for marginalised groups. Technological measures also require better coordination and ecological planning.
3. **Need for Adaptive Governance:** Changing land-use patterns and ecological pressures require locally responsive governance approaches. Wildlife laws need better alignment with present human-wildlife realities.
4. **Limits of Technical Fixes:** Suggestions like fertility control in wild elephants have limited applicability in large fragmented landscapes. Habitat loss and increasing competition for food and water remain the core issues.
5. **Lessons from Bhutan and Nepal:** Community-managed forests, coordinated grazing and predator-proof livestock enclosures have reduced conflict in some areas. Stable conservation funding has supported these local solutions.

Way Forward

1. **Habitat Restoration and Corridor Protection:** Securing wildlife corridors and restoring habitats are necessary for reducing ecological pressure on wildlife. Better land-use planning can reduce unwanted human-wildlife interactions.
2. **Community Participation in Conservation:** Affected communities should become active and equal partners in conflict management. Locally grounded and context-specific solutions are more sustainable in the long term.
3. **Strengthening Compensation and Support:** Compensation systems need timely delivery, wider coverage and easier access. Reliable economic support can reduce resentment against wildlife conservation.
4. **Integrated and Coordinated Approaches:** Conflict management should move beyond isolated conservation measures. Cooperation among governments, NGOs, researchers and local communities is essential.
5. **Education and Awareness Building:** Education and awareness can improve public understanding and tolerance towards wildlife. This can support long-term coexistence between people and wildlife.

Conclusion

Human-wildlife conflict is increasing due to habitat loss, ecological imbalance and growing human pressure on natural resources. The challenge is not to remove wildlife completely from human landscapes. The focus should be on reducing conflict through better ecological planning, habitat connectivity and community participation. Scientifically informed and locally adaptive approaches are necessary to protect biodiversity, secure livelihoods and support peaceful coexistence between humans and wildlife.

Question for practice:

Discuss the major causes, impacts and possible solutions for managing coexistence in human-wildlife conflict zones.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Allow gold ETFs to unlock vaults

Source: The post "Allow gold ETFs to unlock vaults" has been created, based on "Allow gold ETFs to unlock vaults" published in "BusinessLine" on 14th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Indian Economy

Context: India's rising gold imports have become a major macroeconomic concern because they increase pressure on foreign exchange reserves and widen the current account deficit. Although Gold ETFs were introduced to reduce dependence on physical gold purchases, they are now contributing significantly to imports because every new ETF investment requires fresh physical gold backing. Therefore, there is a growing

need to allow Gold ETFs to use exchange-traded commodity derivatives (ETCDs) or gold futures as part of their investment structure.

Nature of Gold Demand in India

1. Socio-cultural demand

- a. Socio-cultural demand includes weddings, festivals like Dhanteras and Akshaya Tritiya, inheritance, and religious purposes.
- b. This category of demand is emotionally driven and highly price-inelastic in nature.
- c. Jewellery demand continues regardless of government appeals or rising gold prices.
- d. Therefore, this segment is difficult to influence through policy measures.

2. Investment demand

1. Investment demand includes bars, coins, and Gold ETFs purchased for wealth preservation and financial security.
2. Investment demand for gold has increased sharply due to economic uncertainty and inflation concerns.
3. Gold ETF assets under management increased from ₹59,000 crore in March 2025 to ₹1.71 lakh crore in March 2026.
4. Demand for bars and coins increased by 34 per cent in the first quarter of 2026.
5. Hence, investment-related demand has become the major contributor to rising gold imports.

Problems with the Existing Gold ETF Structure

1. Increase in physical imports

- a. Gold ETFs currently require full physical backing for every unit issued.
- b. Every fresh investment in Gold ETFs forces asset management companies (AMCs) to import additional gold.
- c. In January 2026, India's gold imports reached nearly \$12 billion.
- d. Thus, Gold ETFs have unintentionally become contributors to the import burden.

2. Idle vaulted gold

- a. By March 2026, Gold ETFs collectively held around 115 tonnes of physical gold in vaults.
- b. This gold remains idle and generates no productive return for investors or the economy.

3. Additional storage and insurance costs

- a. Physical gold holdings require vaulting, insurance, assaying, and security arrangements.
- b. These activities increase operational costs for fund managers.

4. Contradiction in policy objective

- a. Gold ETFs were originally designed to reduce physical gold dependence in the economy.
- b. However, the present structure has increased the demand for imported gold instead of reducing it.

Regulatory Changes Supporting Futures-Based Exposure

1. SEBI allowed Gold ETFs in 2019 to invest in exchange-traded commodity derivatives (ETCDs) with gold as the underlying asset.
2. SEBI also permitted investment in gold-related instruments such as Gold Deposit Schemes (GDS) and Gold Monetisation Schemes (GMS).
3. In 2026, SEBI clarified that ETF NAVs would be based on exchange-polled domestic spot prices.
4. The same benchmark is also used for the settlement of gold futures contracts.
5. Therefore, the regulatory framework already supports the use of futures-based exposure in Gold ETFs.

Suggested Reform

1. AMCs should gradually release a portion of their physical gold holdings into the domestic market.
2. The released gold can be sold through structured auctions to refiners, bullion banks, and jewellers.
3. The proceeds from these sales can then be used to take long positions in domestic gold futures contracts.
4. Gold futures provide complete gold price exposure without requiring full physical ownership.
5. Futures contracts require only margin payments instead of full notional investment.
6. The surplus cash remaining after margin requirements can be invested in Treasury Bills and TREPS.
7. This mechanism can generate additional returns of around 6–7 per cent for investors.
8. Thus, investors continue to receive gold price exposure while reducing the need for fresh imports.

Benefits of the Reform

1. Reduction in gold imports

- a. Existing vaulted gold can re-enter the domestic supply chain instead of remaining idle.
- b. This would reduce the need for fresh imports of gold.
- c. Consequently, pressure on the current account deficit and foreign exchange reserves would decline.

2. Better returns for investors

- a. Investors would earn collateral returns from surplus cash invested in short-term financial instruments.
- b. Under the current system, physical gold stored in vaults generates no income.

3. Development of commodity markets

- a. Greater institutional participation in gold futures markets would improve market liquidity.
- b. Improved liquidity would strengthen price discovery mechanisms on domestic exchanges.

4. Strengthening India's bullion ecosystem: India could gradually evolve from being a passive price taker to becoming a benchmark setter in global bullion markets.

5. Efficient utilisation of financial assets: Financial exposure through futures contracts would replace unnecessary physical stocking of gold. This would improve overall financial efficiency in the economy.

Safeguards Required

1. ETFs should not hold excessive positions in any single futures contract month.
2. Position limits should be imposed to prevent market distortion and excessive speculation.
3. Monthly disclosures should clearly mention physical holdings, futures exposure, basis risk, and collateral returns.
4. Exchanges should improve liquidity through tighter spreads, lower rollover costs, and better market-making systems.
5. These safeguards would ensure transparency and investor protection during the transition process.

Conclusion: India's challenge lies not in gold itself but in the import intensity of investment demand for gold. Allowing Gold ETFs to partially shift from physical holdings to exchange-traded futures can reduce imports, improve investor returns, and deepen commodity markets. Since SEBI's regulatory framework already supports such a transition, the focus should now be on effective implementation and transparency. This reform can provide a structural solution to India's gold import problem without affecting the country's socio-cultural attachment to gold.

Question: Discuss the need for allowing Gold ETFs to use exchange-traded futures as part of their portfolio structure. Examine its implications for India's economy and financial markets.

Source: [Businessline](#)

Telecom Insolvency

Source: The post "Telecom Insolvency" has been created, based on "Telecom Insolvency" published in "BusinessLine" on 14th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Governance

Context: The recent Supreme Court ruling on telecom spectrum has reignited the debate over the relationship between the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and sovereign control over public resources. The Court held that telecom spectrum is not an ordinary corporate asset but a scarce national resource allocated under statutory conditions. The judgment has raised concerns regarding creditor recoveries, treatment of government dues, and the future resolution of stressed telecom companies.

Supreme Court's Position on Spectrum

1. The Supreme Court ruled that telecom spectrum cannot be treated as unrestricted private property during insolvency proceedings.
2. The Court observed that spectrum remains a sovereign public resource controlled by the State.
3. Telecom operators only possess a limited right to use the spectrum under licence conditions.
4. Therefore, spectrum rights cannot be freely transferred through insolvency resolution without regulatory approval.

Concerns of Financial Creditors and Lenders

1. Banks and financial institutions provide loans to telecom companies based largely on the cash flows generated through spectrum usage.
2. If spectrum rights cannot be effectively transferred or monetised during insolvency, lenders face uncertainty regarding recovery of their dues.

3. Uncertainty in recoveries increases risk perception in the telecom sector.
4. As a result, lenders may charge higher risk premiums and borrowing costs may increase for telecom companies.
5. Reduced confidence among lenders can also discourage future investment in the telecom sector.

Concerns of the Government and Regulators

1. The government considers spectrum usage charges, licence fees, and AGR liabilities as sovereign dues arising from the use of a public resource.
2. These dues are not viewed as ordinary commercial or operational debts.
3. Treating government dues as operational debt under IBC may force the State to accept large haircuts while financial creditors recover first.
4. Regulators therefore argue that insolvency proceedings cannot dilute statutory obligations attached to public resources.
5. The government seeks to preserve sovereign control and protect public revenue interests.

Conflict Between IBC and Sectoral Regulation

1. The IBC was designed as a general framework for speedy insolvency resolution and value maximisation.
2. However, sectors such as telecom, mining, aviation, and power operate through licences and concessions granted by the State.
3. These sectors possess a dual character because their operations are commercial while the underlying resources remain public in nature.
4. This creates friction between insolvency law and sector-specific regulatory frameworks.
5. Creditors prioritise efficient resolution and value maximisation, whereas regulators emphasise statutory compliance and sovereign control.

Economic and Market Implications

(a) Impact on asset resolution

- Uncertainty regarding spectrum rights may delay insolvency proceedings and discourage potential buyers.
- Valuable telecom assets may remain tied up in litigation instead of being productively redistributed.
- Delayed resolution can reduce enterprise value as subscribers migrate and infrastructure deteriorates.

(b) Impact on telecom sector financing

- Increased legal uncertainty raises financing costs for telecom operators.
- Higher borrowing costs may weaken the financial health of telecom companies already under stress.

(c) Impact on consumers

- Slow resolution of stressed telecom firms can reduce competition in the telecom market.
- Telecom companies may delay network expansion and rollout of new technologies.
- Consumers may ultimately face weaker service quality and slower technological upgrades.

Need for Reforms

(a) Sector-specific insolvency framework: India may require clearer insolvency rules for sectors dependent on public licences and natural resources. Sectoral realities should be harmonised with the objectives of the IBC.

(b) Greater regulatory participation: Regulators should be involved at an early stage of insolvency proceedings. This would help ensure continuity of services and clarity regarding transfer of operating rights.

(c) Clear treatment of government dues: A transparent mechanism should be developed regarding treatment and priority of statutory dues during insolvency resolution.

(d) Workable transfer mechanisms: Practical procedures should be created for transferring operational rights and licences during restructuring of distressed companies.

Conclusion: The telecom spectrum dispute highlights the broader challenge of balancing insolvency resolution with sovereign control over public resources. While the IBC seeks speedy resolution and maximisation of asset value, regulators aim to protect statutory obligations and public revenue. A balanced framework that harmonises insolvency law with sector-specific regulation is essential for ensuring financial stability, protecting public resources, and maintaining investor confidence in regulated sectors.

Question: “The conflict between the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and sector-specific regulatory frameworks has become increasingly visible in telecom insolvency cases.” Discuss in the context of the Supreme Court’s spectrum ruling and its implications for lenders, the government, and consumers.

Source: [Businessline](#)

AI-Powered Financial Inclusion in India

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure
Introduction

India’s financial inclusion journey is shifting from basic banking access to an AI-driven digital ecosystem. The combination of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is improving digital payments, credit access, and financial service delivery. AI is helping MSMEs, informal workers, rural populations, and women-led enterprises through faster and more data-driven financial solutions. Supported by interoperable digital platforms and policy initiatives, this transformation is making India’s financial system more inclusive, efficient, transparent, and future-ready.

Foundation of India’s Financial Inclusion

- 1. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** India has built a strong digital financial ecosystem through interoperable platforms that support identity verification, payments, and welfare delivery. These systems have improved affordability, accessibility, and efficiency of financial services across the country.
- 2. JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile):** JAM combines bank accounts, Aadhaar identity, and mobile connectivity to create a universal financial identity. As of March 2026, more than 144 crore Aadhaar numbers were generated, while 58.16 crore Jan Dhan accounts held deposits of ₹3.02 lakh crore.
- 3. Mobile Connectivity Expansion:** Mobile infrastructure has strengthened digital financial access in rural and urban areas. India had 125.87 crore wireless subscribers, while 5G services covered 99.9% districts and nearly 85% population.

4. **Unified Payments Interface (UPI):** UPI has transformed digital payments through instant, low-cost, and interoperable bank transfers. With 691 banks connected to the platform, UPI now contributes nearly 81% of total retail payment volume in India.
5. **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT):** DBT transfers welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts and removes intermediaries. As of January 2026, DBT transferred ₹49.09 lakh crore and saved more than ₹4.31 lakh crore by removing fake beneficiaries.
6. **Importance of DPI for AI-based Finance:** These digital systems generate large financial datasets and create a strong base for AI-driven financial services. The ecosystem supports real-time financial inclusion and future digital innovations.

AI and Policy Support for Inclusive Financial Ecosystem

1. **BHASHINI for Multilingual Financial Access:** The RBI and Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD) signed an MoU in February 2026 to improve multilingual banking access. The initiative supports financial services in all 22 scheduled Indian languages and reduces literacy and language barriers.
2. **Banking BHASHINI Initiative:** DIBD and RBI are jointly developing "Banking BHASHINI" for banking-specific language applications. It integrates banking vocabulary, regulatory guidelines, and financial terminology for better communication and service delivery.
3. **RBI Regulatory Sandbox (RS):** The RBI introduced the Regulatory Sandbox framework to promote responsible fintech innovation. It provides a controlled environment for testing digital KYC, APIs, cybersecurity products, and other financial technologies.
4. **Consumer Protection and Risk Management:** The sandbox framework allows regulators to examine risks and benefits before large-scale deployment of technologies. It also supports innovation while maintaining financial stability and consumer safety.
5. **MuleHunter.AI for Cybersecurity:** MuleHunter.AI was launched by the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub in December 2024 to identify mule bank accounts used in cybercrimes. The AI-based system studies transaction patterns in real time and detects suspicious activities linked to money laundering and illegal betting.
6. **Digital ShramSetu for Informal Workers:** Mission Digital ShramSetu was announced in October 2025 to support India's 490 million informal workers. It uses AI, blockchain, and immersive learning to improve financial security, skill verification, and market access.
7. **AI for Inclusive Economic Participation:** Digital ShramSetu helps workers increase productivity and connect with the formal economy. It also strengthens social protection and supports the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Expanding Access to Formal Finance through AI

1. **AI-Based Credit Assessment:** Traditional credit systems often excluded MSMEs, informal workers, and first-time borrowers due to lack of formal credit histories. AI now uses digital payment records, GST filings, bank statements, and utility payments to assess creditworthiness.
2. **Faster and Cost-Effective Lending:** AI converts digital footprints into dynamic risk profiles and improves underwriting decisions. This allows faster, cheaper, and more accurate loan approvals.

3. **Reducing MSME Credit Gap:** AI-driven credit systems can unlock an estimated USD 130–170 billion credit gap. This can reduce dependence of MSMEs on informal sources of borrowing.

4. Unified Lending Interface (ULI):

- **Unified Lending Interface:** It is a DPI-based lending platform that enables frictionless credit access through standardised APIs. It integrates financial and non-financial datasets to support inclusive credit assessment.
- **Data Integration under ULI:** ULI provides access to authentication services, land records, satellite services, and other datasets for loan processing.
- **Rural Credit Expansion through ULI:** ULI is being expanded to Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and District Central Co-operative Banks (DCCBs). This expansion is improving credit access in rural and semi-urban regions.

5. **Account Aggregator (AA) Framework:** The AA framework enables consent-based sharing of financial data between institutions. It reduces paperwork and shortens the loan approval process. **The RBI has granted registration to 17 Account Aggregators.**

Challenges to AI-Powered Financial Inclusion in India

1. **Algorithmic Bias and Discrimination:** AI systems may reflect existing inequalities because they depend on historical datasets. This can affect lending access for low-income and underserved communities.
2. **Data Privacy and Cybersecurity Risks:** AI systems depend on large volumes of personal and behavioural data. This increases risks related to cyberattacks, data misuse, and privacy violations.
3. **Digital Divide and Infrastructure Gaps:** Many rural regions still face poor internet connectivity and limited smartphone access. This reduces access to AI-driven financial services.
4. **Low Digital and Financial Literacy:** Many users, especially in rural areas, struggle to use digital financial platforms. Low awareness also reduces trust in AI-based financial systems.
5. **Lack of Explainability in AI Models:** AI-based decisions are often difficult to understand or challenge. This creates transparency concerns in areas like loan approvals and rejections.
6. **Fragmented Regulatory Framework:** India still lacks a comprehensive and mandatory framework for AI ethics and accountability in finance. Existing guidelines are not fully integrated into one regulatory structure.
7. **Trust Deficit in Digital Systems:** Older populations and remote communities often hesitate to adopt digital financial tools. Lack of trust slows the wider adoption of AI-driven finance.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthening Digital Infrastructure:** Expanding internet access and digital connectivity in rural regions is necessary for wider financial inclusion. Better infrastructure can improve access to AI-driven services.

2. **Promoting Digital and Financial Literacy:** Awareness and training programs can help people use digital financial platforms more confidently. This can increase trust and participation in formal finance.
3. **Building Transparent AI Systems:** AI models should become more transparent and accountable. Clear systems can improve trust and reduce concerns related to unfair decisions.
4. **Strengthening Data Protection Frameworks:** Strong safeguards are needed to protect user data and ensure secure consent-based sharing. This can reduce privacy and cybersecurity risks.
5. **Improving Regulatory Coordination:** Better coordination between regulators, banks, fintech firms, and digital platforms can support responsible AI adoption. This can balance innovation with consumer protection.

Conclusion

India's financial inclusion model is moving towards intelligent and AI-driven financial empowerment. Strong DPI systems, AI-based credit assessment, and policy support are expanding formal finance and improving service delivery. Addressing challenges related to privacy, digital literacy, infrastructure, and regulation will remain important. AI-led financial inclusion can strengthen sustainable growth and support the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the role of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Public Infrastructure in strengthening financial inclusion in India.

Source: PIB

The Xi-Trump Summit — Shadow Boxing on Iran

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

Introduction

The Xi-Trump summit takes place amid rising tensions over Iran, Taiwan, trade and technology restrictions. The Iran conflict has increased pressure on the United States because of rising energy prices, domestic political challenges and instability in the Strait of Hormuz. At the same time, China's close economic ties with Iran and its growing global influence have strengthened Beijing's strategic position. The summit therefore reflects not only bilateral tensions but also a larger geopolitical contest over influence, crisis management and strategic bargaining.

Historical Context and Strategic Parallel

1. **Echoes of the 1972 U.S.-China Summit:** The present summit is compared with the 1972 Nixon-Mao meeting during the Vietnam War. The U.S. then sought Chinese help for an exit from Vietnam, while China gained major diplomatic and strategic benefits.
2. **Strategic Gains for China in 1972:** The U.S. recognised the Communist People's Republic as the sole China and weakened support for Taiwan. Western capital and technology later helped China's economic and geopolitical rise.

3. **Similar Conditions in the Present Crisis:** The current Iran conflict has created a situation where the U.S. again needs Chinese cooperation. The summit therefore carries larger geopolitical meaning beyond normal bilateral talks.

Background of the Present Xi-Trump Summit

1. **Wide Agenda of the Summit:** The summit covers trade, tariffs, technology transfer, Taiwan and global security issues. Iran has emerged as the most urgent matter because of its economic and political impact.
2. **Symbolic Diplomatic Signalling:** China welcomed Trump with a large ceremonial reception in Beijing, including military honours and public celebrations.
3. **Trade and Economic Objectives:** Trump wants China to buy more American soybeans, beef and aircraft. Both countries are also discussing mechanisms to prevent another major trade war.
4. **Strategic Importance of Taiwan:** Taiwan remains one of the biggest tensions between the two powers.

The U.S.-Iran Conflict and Trump's Difficulties

1. **Iran's Asymmetric Strategy:** Iran turned military pressure into strategic leverage through the Strait of Hormuz. Disruption in crude oil supplies caused economic pain across the world.
2. **Domestic Political Pressure on Trump:** The Iran conflict weakened Trump's popularity because of inflation and rising fuel prices. The issue has become politically sensitive ahead of the Congressional midterm elections.
3. **Failure of Quick American Exit:** Iran refused to accept Trump's conditions and blocked an easy diplomatic settlement. This denied Washington a face-saving off-ramp from the conflict.
4. **Limits of Military and Diplomatic Options:** The U.S. "Operation Freedom" failed to restore normal navigation in Hormuz. Suspended negotiations and legal concerns under the War Powers Act further complicated the situation.
5. **Economic Costs of the Conflict:** Closure of Hormuz affected oil and gas movement and increased global energy prices. The crisis also threatened global economic growth and damaged Trump's political standing.

China's Strategic Importance in the Iran Issue

1. **China as Iran's Largest Economic Partner:** China buys more than 80% of Iran's oil exports, valued at nearly \$45 billion in 2025. Additional non-oil trade is estimated at over \$9 billion.
2. **Strategic Coordination Between Beijing and Tehran:** Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Beijing before the summit. After the visit, Tehran adopted a tougher stand on Hormuz, missiles, proxies and nuclear enrichment.
3. **China as a Key External Influence:** China's economic and political links make it highly influential in Iranian decision-making. This increases Beijing's importance in any future settlement process.

China's Possible Strategy at the Summit

1. **Using the Iran Crisis as Leverage:** China appears willing to use prolonged Gulf tensions to secure concessions from Washington. It may seek relaxation on tariffs, sanctions and technology restrictions.
2. **Taiwan as a Negotiating Issue:** Taiwan remains one of the biggest disputes between both countries. China strongly opposes the proposed \$11 billion U.S. weapons package for Taiwan.
3. **China's Diplomatic Hardball:** China and Russia threatened to veto the U.S.-backed UNSC resolution on the Hormuz blockade. This increased pressure on Washington before the summit.
4. **Beijing's Possible Mediator Role:** China may position itself as a mediator or guarantor in any Iran settlement. A phased diplomatic arrangement over the coming months is also possible.
5. **Trump's Search for a Counterstrategy:** Trump wants Chinese cooperation on Iran while giving minimum concessions in return. However, the summit may test his bargaining ability against China's stronger strategic position.

Broader Geopolitical and Strategic Implications

1. **China's Growing Global Influence:** The summit highlights China's expanding role in West Asia and global diplomacy. Beijing increasingly appears confident in dealing with major international crises.
2. **Unequal Strategic Positioning:** Several observers believe China enters the summit from a stronger position. The U.S. faces pressure from war costs, inflation and regional instability.
3. **Taiwan and Technology Competition:** Taiwan remains central because of security tensions and semiconductor production. China also seeks relief from American technology restrictions and chip controls.
4. **Nuclear Arms Dimension:** Trump plans to discuss a possible three-way nuclear arms pact involving the U.S., China and Russia. China currently has more than 600 operational nuclear warheads, while the U.S. and Russia each possess over 5,000 warheads.
5. **Future of U.S.-China Relations:** Despite tensions, both sides are trying to avoid direct escalation. Stable relations are seen as important for trade, global growth and strategic stability.

Conclusion

The Xi-Trump summit highlights the growing linkage between Iran, trade, Taiwan and global power politics. China's influence over Iran and its stronger strategic position have increased its diplomatic leverage against the United States. The summit may shape future U.S.-China relations, regional stability in West Asia and the broader balance of power in an increasingly competitive international order.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Xi-Trump summit reflects the growing strategic role of China in the Iran crisis and U.S.-China relations.

Source: The Hindu

Empowering the Grassroots Economy: A Comprehensive Push for Rural and Semi-Urban MSMEs

Source: The post “Empowering the Grassroots Economy: A Comprehensive Push for Rural and Semi-Urban MSMEs” has been created, based on “Empowering the Grassroots Economy: A Comprehensive Push for Rural and Semi-Urban MSMEs” published in “PIB” on 15th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-3-Indian Economy

Context: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in India’s economic development by promoting entrepreneurship, employment generation, and balanced regional growth. MSMEs contribute around 31.1% to India’s GDP, 48.58% to exports, and nearly 35.4% to manufacturing output. The sector provides livelihoods to around 32.8 crore people and acts as the second-largest source of employment after agriculture. The Government has introduced several measures to improve credit access, formalisation, digital integration, legal protection, and market access for MSMEs.

Importance of MSMEs in Rural and Semi-Urban Areas

- MSMEs promote non-farm employment opportunities in rural and semi-urban regions.
- They strengthen local value chains and encourage decentralized industrial growth.
- MSMEs support traditional artisans, village industries, and self-employment opportunities.
- Rural MSMEs contribute to inclusive growth and reduce regional economic disparities.
- They help integrate small enterprises into national and global supply chains.

Government Measures to Strengthen MSMEs

1. Credit and Financial Support

I. Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS)

- a. The Government implements the Credit Guarantee Scheme through the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE).
- b. The scheme provides collateral-free and third-party guarantee-free loans to Micro and Small Enterprises.
- c. The guarantee coverage limit has been increased from ₹5 crore to ₹10 crore under Union Budget 2025–26.
- d. The Government has introduced a special provision for transgender entrepreneurs by providing a 10% concession in guarantee fees and enhanced guarantee coverage up to 85%.

II. Self-Reliant India (SRI) Fund

- a. The Self-Reliant India Fund was launched to provide equity support to MSMEs through a Fund of Funds mechanism.
- b. The total corpus of the fund is ₹50,000 crore, including ₹10,000 crore from the Government.
- c. The fund has supported 682 MSMEs with investments worth ₹15,442 crore till November 2025.
- d. The Union Budget 2026–27 allocated an additional ₹2,000 crore to strengthen equity support for micro enterprises.

III. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS)

- a. The Government introduced ECLGS to support MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. The scheme helped MSMEs meet operational liabilities and restart businesses.
- c. Guarantees worth ₹3.61 lakh crore were issued under the scheme.

- d. Around 1.19 crore borrowers benefited from ECLGS.
- e. The scheme prevented nearly 14.6 lakh MSME accounts from becoming NPAs.

2. Legal and Institutional Support

I. MSME Act, 2006

- a. The MSME Act provides statutory protection against delayed payments to Micro and Small Enterprises.
- b. Buyers are required to make payments within 45 days of accepting goods or services.
- c. The Government has established 161 Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Councils (MSEFCs) across States and Union Territories for dispute resolution.

II. SAMADHAAN Portal

- a. The Ministry of MSME launched the SAMADHAAN Portal in 2017 to address delayed payment issues.
- b. The portal enables MSMEs to file and monitor payment-related complaints online.
- c. Cases are digitally referred to the respective MSEFCs for adjudication.
- d. Dues worth ₹1,65,034 crore were paid by Central Ministries and CPSEs since May 2020.

III. Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Portal

- a. The Government launched the ODR Portal in June 2025 for digital dispute resolution.
- b. The portal reduces the time and cost involved in resolving delayed payment disputes.

3. Formalisation of MSMEs

I. Udyam Registration Portal and Udyam Assist Platform

- a. The Government launched the Udyam Assist Platform to bring informal micro enterprises into the formal financial system.
- b. Formalisation enables enterprises to access institutional credit and Priority Sector Lending benefits.
- c. As of March 2026, more than 7.9 crore enterprises were registered through Udyam and Udyam Assist platforms.
- d. Around 4.72 crore enterprises were registered on the Udyam Portal, while 3.21 crore enterprises were registered on the Udyam Assist Platform.

II. Inclusion of Traders under MSMEs

- a. The Government included retail and wholesale traders within the MSME framework in July 2021.
- b. This measure enabled traders to avail benefits under Priority Sector Lending norms.

III. Support During MSME Classification Transition

- a. The Government allows MSMEs moving to a higher classification category to continue receiving non-tax benefits for three years.
- b. This policy encourages enterprises to scale up without fear of losing benefits immediately.

4. Digitalisation and Market Access

- a. The Government has promoted digital integration to improve MSME competitiveness and ease of doing business.
- b. The Udyam Portal enables online MSME registration and issuance of Udyam Registration Numbers.
- c. The Government e-Marketplace (GeM) allows MSMEs to sell products directly to government buyers.
- d. The Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) facilitates invoice financing and ensures faster payment realization.
- e. The MSME Champions Portal provides grievance redressal and handholding support to enterprises.

- f. MSME SAMBANDH monitors procurement from MSMEs by public sector entities.
- g. The PMEGP Portal facilitates online application and monitoring of projects.
- h. The PM Vishwakarma Portal supports registration and assistance for traditional artisans.

5. Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Promotion

I. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)

- a. PMEGP is a credit-linked subsidy scheme implemented through the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).
- b. The scheme promotes self-employment by supporting micro enterprises in non-farm sectors.
- c. The maximum project cost eligible for subsidy is ₹50 lakh for manufacturing and ₹20 lakh for services.
- d. Special category beneficiaries receive subsidy of 35% in rural areas and 25% in urban areas.
- e. Between FY 2021–22 and FY 2025–26, the scheme supported more than 5.8 lakh projects.
- f. Bank loans worth over ₹60,000 crore were sanctioned under PMEGP.
- g. The scheme generated employment opportunities for nearly 36.3 lakh persons.

II. PM Vishwakarma Scheme

- a. The PM Vishwakarma Scheme provides holistic support to traditional artisans and craftspeople.
- b. The scheme offers skill training, certification, toolkit incentives, and market linkage support.
- c. Beneficiaries receive a stipend of ₹500 per day during training.
- d. The scheme provides collateral-free loans up to ₹3 lakh at a concessional interest rate of 5%.
- e. More than 30 lakh artisans registered under the scheme by March 2026.
- f. Around 23.7 lakh beneficiaries completed basic training under the programme.
- g. Nearly 5.9 lakh loans worth around ₹5,050 crore were approved under the scheme.

Challenges

- 1. Many rural MSMEs still face low digital literacy and limited awareness about government schemes.
- 2. Delayed payments continue to affect the working capital of small enterprises.
- 3. First-generation entrepreneurs often face difficulties in accessing institutional credit.
- 4. Infrastructure and logistics gaps remain major challenges in remote rural areas.

Way Forward

- 1. The Government should strengthen awareness campaigns so that rural and semi-urban entrepreneurs can fully utilize MSME schemes and digital platforms.
- 2. Financial institutions should simplify loan procedures and improve last-mile credit delivery for first-generation entrepreneurs and informal enterprises.
- 3. The Government should enhance digital infrastructure and internet connectivity in rural areas to improve digital adoption among MSMEs.
- 4. Skill development and entrepreneurship training programmes should be expanded to improve productivity, innovation, and competitiveness of MSMEs.
- 5. Greater integration of MSMEs with e-commerce platforms and global supply chains should be promoted to increase exports and market access.
- 6. Timely payment mechanisms should be strictly enforced to reduce working capital stress faced by MSMEs.
- 7. The Government should strengthen cluster-based development for traditional industries, artisans, and rural enterprises to improve economies of scale.

8. Increased investment in logistics, storage, transport, and rural industrial infrastructure is necessary to improve business efficiency.
9. Public procurement from MSMEs should be further expanded through platforms like GeM and MSME SAMBANDH.
10. Better coordination between Central Government, State Governments, financial institutions, and local implementation agencies is required to ensure effective delivery of benefits to grassroots enterprises.
11. The continued convergence of digital platforms, formalisation initiatives, and financial inclusion measures will help build a resilient, competitive, and self-reliant MSME ecosystem in India.

Conclusion: The Government has adopted a comprehensive approach to strengthen MSMEs through financial support, legal safeguards, digitalisation, formalisation, and entrepreneurship promotion. Schemes such as CGTMSE, PMEGP, PM Vishwakarma, Udyam, GeM, and TReDS are improving the ease of doing business for rural and semi-urban enterprises. Continued coordination between digital platforms, financial institutions, and grassroots implementation agencies is essential to ensure inclusive and self-reliant economic growth in India.

Question: "MSMEs are central to India's inclusive and self-reliant economic growth, especially in rural and semi-urban areas." Discuss the measures taken by the Government to strengthen the MSME ecosystem.

Source: [PIB](#)

Building a Preventive Health Culture in India

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Introduction

India has significantly improved its healthcare system through advanced hospitals, skilled doctors, and better treatment facilities over the last four decades. However, the country still faces a growing burden of non-communicable diseases, delayed diagnosis, and low preventive awareness. Healthcare largely remains focused on curing illness after it develops rather than protecting health before disease begins. This situation highlights the need for a strong preventive health culture based on early detection, regular monitoring, healthy lifestyles, and greater public awareness.

Different Types of Healthcare Services in India

1. **Primary Health Care Services:** Primary healthcare is the first level of contact between people and the healthcare system. It focuses on basic treatment, preventive care, and general wellness through PHCs, sub-centres, ASHA workers, immunization services, and maternal and child healthcare.
2. **Secondary Health Care Services:** Secondary healthcare provides more advanced treatment through district hospitals, nursing homes, specialist doctors, diagnostic labs, and imaging centres. It mainly handles moderate illnesses, injuries, minor surgeries, and emergency stabilization services.
3. **Tertiary Health Care Services:** Tertiary healthcare provides highly specialized treatment through advanced hospitals and expert medical institutions. Services include organ transplantation, cancer treatment, neurosurgery, cardiology care, intensive care units, and complex surgeries in hospitals like AIIMS and large private hospitals.

4. **Preventive Health Care Services:** Preventive healthcare focuses on avoiding diseases before they develop through regular health check-ups, vaccination drives, lifestyle counselling, and screening for hypertension, diabetes, and cancer. It aims to reduce long-term disease burden and improve quality of life.
5. **Palliative and End-of-Life Care Services:** It provides comfort and support to patients with life-limiting illnesses. It is not about curing the disease but improving the quality of life for patients and families. It includes pain management, emotional support, hospice care, and counselling services for patients and their families.
6. **Home Health Care Services:** Home healthcare provides medical and rehabilitation support at patients' homes, especially for elderly, post-surgical, and mobility-challenged individuals. It includes nursing care, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, medical equipment support, and post-discharge monitoring.
7. **Telemedicine and Digital Health Services:** Telemedicine uses digital technology to provide healthcare services remotely. It includes video consultations, online prescriptions, health monitoring apps, and government platforms like eSanjeevani, improving healthcare access in rural and urban areas.
8. **Emergency Medical Services:** Emergency medical services provide rapid response during accidents, strokes, cardiac arrests, and other medical emergencies. Services include ambulance networks, trauma care units, emergency hospital treatment, and government-supported transport systems for pregnant women and critical patients.

Difference Between Treating Illness and Preserving Health

1. Definition:

- a) **Treating illness:** It focuses on curing disease after the body becomes sick or damaged.
- b) **Preserving health:** It focuses on protecting health before disease develops through regular care and healthy habits.

2. Starting Point:

- a) **Treating illness:** Medical action usually begins after symptoms appear.
- b) **Preserving health:** Action begins before symptoms develop through early monitoring and preventive care.

3. Main Philosophy:

- a) **Treating illness:** Health is viewed as something to recover after it is lost.
- b) **Preserving health:** Health is viewed as something that must be protected every day.

4. Nature of Care:

- a) **Treating illness:** It depends mainly on hospitals, doctors, medicines, and advanced treatment.
- b) **Preserving health:** It depends on lifestyle correction, routine health checks, awareness, and self-discipline.

5. Public Response:

- a) **Treating illness:** Most people seek medical care only when they feel unwell.
- b) **Preserving health:** People regularly monitor health even when no visible symptoms exist.

6. Long-Term Impact:

- a) **Treating illness:** Late treatment often reduces the possibility of early reversal of disease.
- b) **Preserving health:** Early detection and timely intervention can prevent, delay, or reverse many chronic diseases.

7. Social Importance:

- a) **Treating illness:** It mainly addresses existing health problems of individuals.
- b) **Preserving health:** It protects families, improves productivity, and strengthens the long-term health of the nation.

8. India's Present Need:

India has already developed strong treatment capacity through modern hospitals and skilled clinicians. The next requirement is to build a preventive health culture based on awareness, early action, and daily health responsibility.

Cause of Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in India

1. **Growing NCD Crisis:** Heart attacks, strokes, cancer, and diabetes have become the leading causes of death in India. Around 270 million Indians are living with chronic diseases today.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** A large number of people remain unaware of their illness until symptoms become serious. Many individuals avoid medical check-ups because they do not feel unwell in the early stages.
3. **Lifestyle Changes and Physical Inactivity:** Urban lifestyles have increased sedentary habits and desk-bound work culture. Reduced physical activity is contributing to obesity and metabolic disorders.
4. **Dietary Transition:** Traditional diets are increasingly being replaced by processed foods rich in salt, refined sugar, and trans fats. These unhealthy food habits are increasing lifestyle-related diseases.
5. **Tobacco, Alcohol, and Pollution:** Tobacco and alcohol consumption are major causes of heart disease, cancer, and respiratory illness. Rising air pollution is also contributing to chronic respiratory diseases.
6. **Urbanization and Aging Population:** Rapid urbanization and rising disposable incomes are increasing unhealthy lifestyle practices across all income groups. At the same time, a growing elderly population faces higher risks of chronic diseases.

7. **Economic and Social Impact:** Preventable illness reduces productivity and affects families, workplaces, and national growth. A country cannot achieve its full potential when a large population suffers from avoidable diseases.

The Critical Window for Prevention

1. **Age Group at Higher Risk:** The period between 30 and 40 years of age is becoming a major turning point for health risks. Early metabolic and cardiovascular problems begin to appear during these years.
2. **Pressure of Career and Family Responsibilities:** People in this age group are usually busy building careers and supporting families. As a result, they often ignore regular health check-ups and preventive care.
3. **Delayed Detection of Diseases:** By the age of 40, many individuals are no longer disease-free. Diseases are often detected late because symptoms appear only after serious damage has already started.
4. **Importance of Early Intervention:** The human body responds well when action is taken early. Timely detection, lifestyle correction, and regular monitoring can prevent, delay, or even reverse many chronic conditions.
5. **Limited Window for Action:** The opportunity for early reversal does not remain open forever. Delayed response increases long-term health complications and treatment burdens.

Initiatives for Preventive Health Care in India

1. **Ayushman Bharat – Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM):** AAM has transformed Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and sub-centres into wellness centres. These centres provide screening for hypertension, diabetes, and common cancers such as oral, breast, and cervical cancer.
2. **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP):** UIP provides free essential vaccines to more than **26 million newborns and 29 million pregnant women every year**. It plays a major role in preventing infectious diseases.
3. **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS):** NPCDCS focuses on early diagnosis and management of major non-communicable diseases. The programme aims to reduce the growing burden of chronic illness.
4. **FIT India Movement:** FIT India promotes physical activity, exercise, and wellness practices. It encourages healthier lifestyles to reduce lifestyle-related diseases.
5. **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP):** IDSP strengthens disease surveillance and early warning systems. It helps in detecting health risks and disease outbreaks at an early stage.

Way Forward

1. **Building a Culture of Self-Stewardship:** Prevention should become a personal and social responsibility rather than a temporary campaign. People must understand that protecting health is an important daily duty.
2. **Promoting Routine Health Checks:** Regular screening and early diagnosis should become common health practices. Early action can reduce disease burden and improve quality of life.
3. **Encouraging Lifestyle Correction:** Healthy diets, physical activity, and avoidance of tobacco and alcohol are necessary for long-term health protection. Lifestyle correction can reduce many preventable diseases.
4. **Strengthening Health Awareness:** People need greater awareness about silent diseases and hidden risk factors. Health education at family and community levels can support early prevention.
5. **Moving Beyond Hospital-Based Thinking:** National health should begin with preventive action at home and in communities. Healthcare should not depend only on hospitals and treatment facilities.

Conclusion

India has built strong treatment capacity through modern healthcare infrastructure and medical expertise. The next stage of progress requires greater focus on prevention, early diagnosis, and healthy lifestyles. Building a preventive health culture through awareness, routine monitoring, and responsible habits is essential to reduce disease burden and strengthen the country's long-term social and economic development.

Question for practice:

Discuss the need for building a preventive health culture in India in the context of the rising burden of non-communicable diseases and changing healthcare challenges.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Capital Flight and Pressure on the Rupee

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

India's external sector is facing rising pressure due to rupee depreciation, increasing oil prices, and capital outflows. The Persian Gulf conflict and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz have increased uncertainty in global markets. At the same time, rising LPG prices have affected working-class households and increased economic distress. The situation has become more serious because foreign capital has exited India even without any rise in interest rates in advanced economies.

Capital Flight and Pressure on the Rupee

1. **Global uncertainty and capital outflows:** The outbreak of hostilities in the Persian Gulf increased uncertainty in financial markets. This led foreign investors to withdraw capital from India and weakened the rupee against major currencies.

2. **Rising oil prices and external pressure:** Higher oil prices widened India's current account deficit because India depends heavily on oil imports. Capital flight combined with expensive oil imports increased pressure on the rupee.
3. **Economic impact on ordinary people:** The rise in LPG prices increased hardships for working-class families. It also contributed to reverse migration of workers from cities back to villages.
4. **Imported Inflation:** As a net importer of crude oil, electronics, and fertilizers, a weaker rupee increases the costs of these goods, driving up domestic inflation.
5. **Increased Borrowing Costs:** The depreciation increases the currency risk and cost of servicing External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) for Indian firms.
6. **Existing weakness in the rupee:** The rupee had already been facing depreciatory pressure before the war began. The conflict only accelerated a process that was already visible in the economy.

Causes Behind the Crisis

1. **Difference between Indian and foreign interest rates:** Foreign investors compare returns in India with returns in countries like the U.S. and the U.K. If foreign interest rates rise, investors may shift money away from India.
2. **Inflation and currency risks:** High inflation and rupee depreciation reduce the net returns earned by foreign investors on Indian assets. This lowers the attractiveness of investing in emerging economies like India.
3. **Expectations can trigger capital flight:** Capital can move quickly across borders even before any actual policy change. Mere expectations of future interest rate hikes can cause investors to withdraw money from emerging markets.
4. **Similarity with the 2013 taper tantrum:** In 2013, the U.S. Federal Reserve indicated that it may gradually reduce quantitative easing introduced after the 2008 financial crisis. Even without an actual rise in interest rates, investors expected tighter monetary policy and withdrew large amounts of capital from emerging economies. This sudden capital outflow became known as the 'taper tantrum'.
5. **Current situation more worrying:** Capital flight is taking place even though the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of England have not increased interest rates. The U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of England maintained interest rates at 3.75% since December 2025 because they initially believed that the rise in oil prices and inflation would be temporary. They have also not given any definite signal about future rate hikes.
6. **Dependence of emerging economies on U.S. monetary policy:** Emerging economies often have to adjust their interest rates according to U.S. monetary policy. If the U.S. raises rates, countries like India may also be forced to raise rates to protect their currencies.

Policy Response and Its Limitations

1. **RBI intervention in currency markets:** The RBI actively intervened in the foreign exchange market by selling dollars from its forex reserves. These steps aimed to reduce excessive volatility and prevent disorderly depreciation of the rupee.
2. **Regulatory tightening to curb speculation:** The RBI imposed restrictions on certain foreign exchange derivative contracts to reduce speculative pressure on the rupee. It also restricted authorized dealer banks' Net Open Position (NOP) in the onshore market to US\$100 million, forcing banks to reduce excessive dollar hoarding.
3. **Government measures to control external pressure:** The government increased import duties on gold to reduce non-essential imports and ease pressure on the current account deficit. The appeal to reduce gold and petrol consumption also reflected concerns over rising external vulnerability.
4. **Difficulty in using interest rates as a defence:** India can raise domestic interest rates to protect the rupee from further depreciation. However, higher interest rates can reduce domestic investment and slow economic growth.
5. **Limits of current measures:** Forex intervention can reduce short-term volatility, but continuous intervention can gradually reduce foreign exchange reserves. Domestic policy measures also cannot fully control global investor sentiment, especially when capital flows are influenced by U.S. Federal Reserve policies and global uncertainty.
6. **Structural vulnerabilities remain:** The present measures have not addressed deeper problems such as dependence on oil imports and volatile foreign capital flows. If global interest rates rise in the future, pressure on the rupee and the external account may increase further.

Way Forward

1. **Need to reduce external vulnerability:** India needs stronger measures to reduce dependence on rising oil imports and unstable foreign capital. This is important for protecting the current account and the rupee.
2. **Importance of stable monetary conditions:** The uncertainty surrounding future global interest rates requires careful economic management. Sudden global financial changes can quickly affect emerging economies like India.
3. **Managing inflationary pressures:** Long periods of high oil prices can increase inflation expectations across the economy. Rising wages and prices may further strengthen inflationary pressure.
4. **Preparing for future financial stress:** If advanced economies raise interest rates in the future, pressure on India's external account may increase further. Economic policy must therefore prepare for worsening global conditions.

Conclusion

India's external sector remains vulnerable due to capital flight, rising oil prices, and continued pressure on the rupee. The situation is more concerning because global uncertainty and investor expectations alone are driving

capital outflows. Short-term policy measures may reduce immediate pressure, but structural weaknesses linked to oil dependence and volatile capital flows continue to threaten economic stability.

Question for practice:

Examine the causes behind capital flight and increasing pressure on the rupee in India amid global economic uncertainty.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Trade, supply chains and economic statecraft

Source: The post "Trade, supply chains and economic statecraft" has been created, based on "Trade, supply chains and economic statecraft" published in "The Hindu" on 16th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International relations

Context: The boundary between economics and geopolitics has increasingly blurred in the 21st century. Trade, supply chains, technology partnerships, and energy corridors have become instruments of strategic power. In this changing global order, economic statecraft has emerged as a key feature of international relations, creating both opportunities and challenges for India.

Trade as Strategic Leverage

1. Economic tools such as tariffs, export controls, sanctions, and supply-chain restrictions are increasingly being used for geopolitical purposes.
2. Critical minerals, semiconductor alliances, and energy dependencies now influence global power politics.
3. The weaponisation of interdependence, such as restrictions on rare-earth exports and tariff politics, shows that commerce can be used coercively.
4. Therefore, economic diplomacy has become closely linked with national security.

Factors Supporting India's Rise

a) Domestic Reforms and Economic Strength

- India's reforms in digitisation, infrastructure expansion, and deregulation have reduced transaction costs and improved predictability.
- These reforms have made India an attractive destination for global firms seeking long-term investments.

b) Geopolitical Realignment

- The global search for alternatives to concentrated production systems, especially around China, has increased demand for diversified manufacturing bases.
- India possesses advantages such as a large labour force, political stability, and market depth.

c) Strategic Shift in Foreign Policy

- India now treats trade agreements, technology partnerships, and supply-chain diplomacy as instruments of statecraft.
- Semiconductor cooperation, digital public infrastructure exports, and critical-mineral partnerships reflect this approach.

Challenges Before India

1. Excessive dependence on any one country for technology, minerals, or markets can create vulnerabilities.
2. India must balance deeper global integration with strategic autonomy.
3. To remain competitive, India needs improvements in logistics, regulatory clarity, workforce skills, research, and digital infrastructure.
4. Credibility as a democratic and reliable economic partner must also be maintained through institutional strength and social cohesion.

Emerging Global Trade Order

1. Traditional multilateralism is weakening due to geopolitical rivalry and domestic political pressures.
2. Countries are increasingly relying on flexible bilateral and regional partnerships.
3. This shift provides India space to build issue-based coalitions and strengthen economic diplomacy.

Way Forward

1. India should diversify trade and investment partnerships to avoid overdependence on any single country.
2. Greater investment in infrastructure, logistics, research, and skilling is necessary to strengthen competitiveness.
3. India must deepen participation in resilient supply chains through semiconductor, critical-mineral, and technology partnerships.
4. Stable regulations and ease of doing business reforms should continue to attract global manufacturing.
5. Economic diplomacy should be integrated with foreign policy to build strategic coalitions across regions and sectors.
6. India should pursue balanced globalisation by remaining open to trade while safeguarding strategic autonomy.

Conclusion: The emerging global order presents India with a historic opportunity to become a central pillar of global supply chains and economic partnerships. However, this opportunity is not automatic. India must pursue balanced global integration, strengthen domestic competitiveness, and protect strategic autonomy to convert geopolitical demand into long-term economic power.

Question: Economic diplomacy and supply-chain resilience are reshaping global geopolitics. Discuss India's opportunities and challenges in the emerging world order.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India and Strategic Autonomy in the Changing Global Order

Source: The post "India and Strategic Autonomy in the Changing Global Order" has been created, based on "The Iran war, India's strategic autonomy challenges" published in "The Hindu" on 16th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International relations

Context: India's strategic autonomy refers to its ability to pursue independent foreign and economic policies without excessive dependence on any major power bloc. Recent developments such as the Iran conflict, U.S. unilateralism, and changing global economic alignments have created new challenges for India's foreign policy and economic diplomacy.

Growing Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

I. Impact of West Asian Conflict

- a. The Israel-Iran conflict has exposed India's vulnerabilities in energy security, geopolitical stability, and regional connectivity.
- b. India's interests in a stable Iran are linked to energy imports and strategic projects such as Chabahar port.
- c. Escalation in West Asia threatens global commerce and supply chains, directly affecting India.

II. Rise of Economic and Military Unilateralism

- a. The U.S. is increasingly demanding alignment of economic policies with its strategic interests.
- b. Unlike the earlier liberal economic order, the current system is becoming more coercive and exclusionary.
- c. Such pressure limits the policy flexibility needed for strategic autonomy.

III. Pressure on India's Multi-Alignment Policy

- a. India has maintained balanced relations with the U.S., Russia, Europe, Iran, and China simultaneously.
- b. However, demands to reduce Russian oil imports, weaken ties with Iran, and align against China create diplomatic difficulties.
- c. India's independent approach is increasingly challenged by bloc politics.

India's Efforts to Protect Strategic Autonomy

I. Diversification of Partnerships

- a. India has strengthened ties with Europe, France, and the EU through defence and trade agreements.
- b. The Rafale deal and India-EU FTA negotiations reflect efforts to diversify strategic partnerships.

II. Economic and Defence Cooperation

- a. India seeks technology transfer and domestic manufacturing through defence deals.
- b. Such partnerships aim to reduce overdependence on any single country.

III. Continued Multi-Vector Diplomacy

- a. India continues engaging with multiple power centres without formally joining military alliances.
- b. This reflects its commitment to independent decision-making in foreign policy.

Limitations and Risks

1. Dependence on foreign defence technology may undermine India's "Make in India" ambitions.
2. Europe may eventually align with U.S. strategic priorities during major geopolitical crises.
3. Trade agreements and defence partnerships do not completely remove political or economic risks.
4. A hierarchical global order dominated by major powers may reduce policy space for developing countries like India.

Way Forward

1. India should accelerate defence indigenisation and reduce dependence on external suppliers.
2. Energy security must be strengthened through diversification of import sources and renewable energy expansion.
3. India should continue a balanced multi-alignment strategy while avoiding rigid bloc politics.

4. Strong domestic manufacturing, technological capability, and economic resilience are essential for genuine strategic autonomy.
5. India must deepen engagement with the Global South and promote a multipolar international order.
6. Greater investment in diplomacy, regional connectivity, and supply-chain resilience is necessary.

Conclusion: The emerging geopolitical and economic order is making strategic autonomy more difficult yet more important for India. While external pressures are increasing, India can preserve its independent foreign policy by strengthening domestic capabilities, diversifying partnerships, and pursuing balanced engagement with all major powers.

Question: Recent geopolitical conflicts and shifts in the global economic order have posed challenges to India's strategic autonomy. Discuss.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Is Multipolarity Dead in the Age of Trump and Xi?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- international relations

Introduction

The global order after the Cold War first moved towards American dominance and later towards multipolarity with the rise of middle powers and regional groupings. However, recent developments in US-China relations, especially under Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, indicate the return of big power politics. The growing focus on US-China leadership has raised questions about whether multipolarity is weakening and whether the world is moving towards a new bipolar order.

From American Unipolarity to Challenges Against US Dominance

1. **Collapse of Soviet Union and rise of US dominance:** The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a unipolar world led by the US. Many strategic thinkers believed American power would dominate global politics for a long time.
2. **“End of History” thesis:** Political scientist Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy represented the final stage of political evolution. He believed the American model would become the dominant global system.
3. **Challenge from “Clash of Civilisations”:** Political scientist Samuel Huntington rejected the idea of permanent US supremacy in 1993. He argued that future conflicts would emerge from civilisational and regional differences.
4. **Rise of Islamic terrorism:** The US soon faced major challenges from Islamic terrorism. The World Trade Centre attack in 2001 exposed the limits of American dominance.
5. **Declining confidence in unipolarity:** Global conflicts and security threats showed that military and economic superiority alone could not guarantee complete global control. This gradually weakened confidence in a fully unipolar world.

Rise of Multipolarity and the Emergence of Middle Powers

1. **Emergence of middle powers:** Countries like India, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, France and South Africa emerged as important global players. Their growing influence reduced the dominance of a single power.
2. **Rise of plurilateral groupings:** Groupings such as ASEAN, EU, Quad and BRICS became influential in global politics. These platforms promoted cooperation among multiple regional powers.
3. **Growing popularity of multipolarity:** The term “multipolarity” became popular in the early 21st century. Many believed a system with multiple centres of power would create balanced global governance.
4. **Support for regionalism and localism:** Multipolarity encouraged greater regional participation in world affairs. Many countries preferred a global system where local and regional interests received more importance.
5. **Limits of power asymmetry:** Many believed no country could challenge America’s economic, military and technological strength. However, several events, including the latest war in Iran, showed that stronger powers do not always succeed.

Growing US Concerns Over China’s Expanding Global Influence

1. **Early US policy of engagement with China:** During the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George Bush, the US tried to integrate China into the global system. The expectation was that economic growth would make China more liberal and responsible.
2. **China emerged as a strategic challenger:** Over the last 15 years, the US increasingly viewed China as a major strategic competitor. China’s rapid economic and military growth raised concerns in Washington.
3. **Obama’s “Pivot to Asia” strategy:** The Obama administration launched the “pivot to Asia” policy to respond to China’s growing influence. The broader aim was to strengthen American presence in Asia.
4. **Concerns in Pentagon’s review:** The 2010 Quadrilateral Security Review welcomed China’s rise but also raised concerns over Beijing’s defence spending and governance system. It questioned China’s long-term intentions.
5. **Rise in American apprehensions:** US concerns over China continued to increase in the following years. Washington increasingly feared that China could eventually challenge American global dominance.

Trump–Xi Dynamics and the Return of Big Power Hyphenation

1. **Xi Jinping’s rise and China’s ambitions:** Xi Jinping’s rise in 2013 strengthened the image of China as an ambitious global power. China made major progress in deep-tech, defence and space under his leadership.

2. **China's call for joint global leadership:** Xi repeatedly argued that the US and China should work together to ensure global security and prosperity. He presented both countries as major powers responsible for the future of humanity.
3. **"Giant ship" metaphor in US-China relations:** Xi used the metaphor of a "giant ship" to describe US-China relations. He argued that both countries should carefully guide the world through global instability.
4. **Trump's use of the G2 idea:** Trump also used the idea of "G2" to describe the US-China relationship. He suggested that the two countries together hold major responsibility in world affairs.
5. **Declining interest in plurilateral platforms:** Both powers appear less interested in sharing leadership through larger groupings. The US showed less interest in Quad and NATO, while China appeared less enthusiastic about BRICS and G20, especially under India's leadership.

Conclusion

Recent developments show the growing return of big power politics centred around the US and China. The increasing focus on bilateral leadership and declining importance of plurilateral groupings have weakened earlier optimism surrounding multipolarity. However, the continued influence of middle powers and regional platforms suggests that the global order is still evolving and remains far from fully bipolar.

Question for practice:

Evaluate whether the growing dominance of the US and China under Donald Trump and Xi Jinping is weakening the idea of multipolarity in global politics.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Productivity, not just growth, for Viksit Bharat

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

India has maintained strong economic growth with macroeconomic stability in the post-pandemic period. Real GDP growth reached **6.5% in FY2024-25**, supported by domestic demand, controlled inflation, fiscal consolidation, and a stable financial sector. However, according to the **KPMG report on India's next growth phase**, achieving **Viksit Bharat @2047** requires a transition from growth in scale to growth in productivity. This shift needs stronger manufacturing, efficient resource allocation, skilled human capital, technology adoption, and deeper structural reforms.

Manufacturing as the Engine of Structural Transformation

1. **Manufacturing and long-term growth:** Manufacturing is necessary for large-scale employment generation and productivity growth. It acts as a bridge between low-productivity agriculture and high-productivity modern sectors.

2. **Limits of service-led growth:** India's growth has been driven mainly by services, while manufacturing has not expanded enough to absorb labour or create broad-based productivity gains. This creates a structurally weak growth pattern.
3. **Weak manufacturing structure:** India's manufacturing sector has many small and low-productivity firms, but very few medium-sized firms capable of scaling. This reduces export competitiveness and productivity growth.
4. **Need for manufacturing depth:** Manufacturing remains around 17% of GDP despite growth in electronics and engineering exports. India needs deeper production ecosystems, stronger domestic value addition, and better integration with global value chains.
5. **Labour and efficiency gaps:** A large share of labour still remains in agriculture where productivity is much lower than manufacturing and services. Efficiency gaps continue despite large investments in infrastructure.

Productivity Challenges and Weak Business Dynamism

1. **Slow creative destruction:** Productivity growth depends on efficient firms replacing inefficient firms. This process remains slow in India.
2. **Impact of zombie firms:** Many low-productivity "zombie firms" continue operating despite poor financial performance. These firms tie up labour and capital in inefficient activities.
3. **Debt concentration in weak firms:** Zombie firms account for a disproportionately large share of total debt and assets. This creates systemic inefficiencies and reduces productive use of capital.
4. **Financing pattern and firm recovery:** Bank-financed firms are more likely to become zombies and remain in distress for longer periods. Equity-financed firms are less prone to zombification and recover more sustainably.
5. **Institutional barriers to productivity:** Financial and regulatory systems often sustain inefficient firms instead of enabling exit. This weakens efficient reallocation of resources.
6. **Impact on productive firms:** Weak firms crowd out credit from productive firms. This reduces overall productivity growth and business dynamism.

MSME Competitiveness, Human Capital, and Technology Upgradation

1. **Importance of MSMEs:** MSMEs employ more than 110 million people and are critical for manufacturing growth. However, many MSMEs face low productivity and weak competitiveness.
2. **Need for MSME productivity reforms:** Productivity improvement requires cash-flow-based lending using GST and digital data. Cluster-based upgrading and export enablement are also important.
3. **Transition towards competitive enterprises:** Small firms need support to become competitive mid-sized enterprises. This is necessary for stronger manufacturing growth.

4. **Industry 4.0 adoption:** Greater use of Industry 4.0 technologies among MSMEs is important for improving productivity and manufacturing depth.
5. **India's demographic advantage:** India's median age is 28 years, and the working-age population is expected to exceed 1.13 billion by 2050. This creates a major opportunity for growth.
6. **Linking education with employment:** India needs closer integration between education, skilling, and employment. This is necessary for building a future-ready workforce.
7. **Role of the National Education Policy:** The National Education Policy must be operationalised effectively. Apprenticeship-linked degrees should also be expanded.
8. **Re-skilling for emerging sectors:** Re-skilling is needed in AI-enabled services, advanced manufacturing, and digital technologies. The focus should shift from enrolment to employability.

Infrastructure, Governance, and Institutional Reforms

1. **Shift from asset creation to efficiency:** India has largely completed its infrastructure foundation phase through public investment and digital platforms. The next phase requires converting these investments into productivity gains.
2. **Infrastructure Phase II priorities:** Focus areas include multimodal logistics corridors, plug-and-play industrial cities, digital logistics stacks, and reliable energy-water-digital infrastructure. These are important for sectors like semiconductors, green hydrogen, defence manufacturing, and AI-driven infrastructure.
3. **Urban and trade reforms:** Cities must function as productive economic regions through transit-led planning and stronger municipal finance. Trade diversification and stronger domestic value addition are also necessary for external resilience.
4. **Regulatory and financial reforms:** Productivity growth requires simpler regulations, easier labour systems, stronger insolvency mechanisms, better credit allocation, and expanded access to financing. These reforms can improve business dynamism and firm scaling.
5. **Importance of implementation and execution:** Sustained growth depends on timely project completion, stronger institutional delivery, digital transparency, and better feedback systems for policy correction. Innovation must move effectively from research to production.

Conclusion

India has created a strong foundation through economic growth, infrastructure expansion, and macroeconomic stability. Achieving **Viksit Bharat @2047** now depends on productivity-led development supported by manufacturing depth, competitive firms, skilled human capital, technology adoption, and institutional reforms. Efficient implementation, better resource allocation, and sustained competitiveness will determine whether India can convert rapid growth into long-term economic strength.

Question for practice:

Examine why India must shift from growth at scale to productivity-led development to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

