

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



सत्यमेव जयते

UPSC

2nd Week

July. 2026

Features :

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

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Grand ambitions: On India's cooperative sector

Source: The post "Grand ambitions: On India's cooperative sector" has been created based on "Grand ambitions: On India's cooperative sector" published in "The Hindu" on 8th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 3- Indian Economy

Context: India established the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 to strengthen and modernise the cooperative movement as a people-centric and inclusive model of economic development. As the Ministry completed five years on 6 July 2026, it has focused on expanding cooperatives beyond agriculture into sectors such as dairy, fisheries, housing, banking, consumer services, and exports.

Role of the Ministry of Cooperation and Opportunities for the Cooperative Sector

1. Promoting a Worker-Centric Development Model

- a. The cooperative model provides an alternative to hypercompetitive capitalism by prioritising the welfare and participation of members.
- b. It promotes inclusive economic development while reducing the undesirable social consequences associated with purely profit-driven business models.

2. Expanding Cooperatives Beyond Agriculture

- a. Traditionally, cooperatives have been largely confined to agriculture.
- b. The Ministry seeks to expand cooperatives into **other sectors, particularly services**, thereby increasing their contribution to the economy.

3. Bringing Policy Coherence

- a. The Ministry aims to provide **policy coherence** across agriculture, dairy, fisheries, banking, housing, consumer cooperatives, and exports.
- b. A coordinated policy framework can strengthen the overall cooperative ecosystem.

4. Integrating Fragmented Cooperatives

- a. Since cooperatives are relatively **small-scale and fragmented**, the Ministry seeks to organise them and connect them with the broader economy.
- b. This balancing intervention is an **economic, political, and social imperative** in an economy that increasingly rewards large-scale enterprises.

5. Strengthening Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)

- a. Through a reformed legal framework, **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** have been empowered to undertake **more than 25 business activities**.
- b. This has transformed PACS into **multifunctional institutions** capable of delivering a wide range of economic services in rural India.

6. Expanding Market Access

- a. The Ministry has facilitated the establishment of **new national-level multi-State cooperative societies**.
- b. These institutions expand market access for cooperative members and strengthen cooperative value chains from **production to global markets**.

7. Encouraging Competitive Cooperative Enterprises

- a. Cooperative enterprises are being encouraged to **grow and compete** while retaining their cooperative character.
- b. A **National Cooperation Policy** is also being prepared to provide long-term policy direction for the sector.

8. Diversifying Cooperative Activities

- a. The Ministry is encouraging cooperatives to expand into **production and marketing**, in addition to agricultural credit and input facilitation.
- b. Such diversification can help address the **endemic crisis in the agricultural sector**.

9. Building a Sustainable Economic Alternative

- a. A well-coordinated yet federated cooperative sector can offset the **social, environmental, and political costs of global capitalism**, which currently dominates the economy.
- b. As governments and business leaders across the world show renewed interest in cooperatives, India has the opportunity to develop its cooperative sector as a **global model**.

Challenges Before the Cooperative Sector

1. Legacy of Corruption and Inefficiency: Corruption and inefficiency have historically weakened the functioning of India's cooperative sector and limited its potential.

2. Concerns of States and Local Communities: States and local communities fear losing control over cooperatives to a **national-level mechanism**. Addressing these concerns is essential for ensuring wider acceptance of reforms.

3. Balancing Centralisation and Decentralisation: The key challenge lies in finding the **right balance between consolidation and decentralisation** so that cooperatives become stronger without weakening local autonomy.

4. Balancing Localisation and Nationalisation: The cooperative movement must strike a balance between **local participation and national-level coordination** to ensure both efficiency and democratic functioning.

5. Balancing Technology and Human Labour: While technology can improve efficiency, the cooperative model should continue to remain **people-centric** by maintaining an appropriate balance between technology and human labour.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Cooperative Federalism: The Ministry should continue working in close collaboration with **States and national federations** to ensure cooperative reforms are implemented in a consensual and effective manner.

2. Enhance Institutional Capacity: Greater emphasis should be placed on **capacity building** so that cooperative societies can improve governance, professionalism, and service delivery.

3. Promote Digital Transformation: **Digital technology** should be used wisely to improve transparency, efficiency, and market access without compromising the participatory nature of cooperatives.

4. Improve Market Linkages: Cooperatives should be connected to **national and global markets** through stronger value chains and better marketing support, enabling members to receive higher returns.

5. Ensure Balanced Growth: Reforms should strike the **right balance between consolidation and decentralisation, localisation and nationalisation, and technology and human labour**, so that cooperatives remain both competitive and democratic.

6. Finalise the National Cooperation Policy: The proposed **National Cooperation Policy** should provide a clear roadmap for expanding cooperatives into production, marketing, services, and exports while preserving their cooperative ethos.

Conclusion: The Ministry of Cooperation has created an opportunity to transform India's cooperative sector into a **strong, diversified, and worker-centric model of development**. By ensuring policy coordination, strengthening institutions, respecting the federal structure, and promoting balanced reforms, India can build a cooperative movement that combines **economic competitiveness with social inclusion** and emerges as a **global model of cooperative development**.

Question: India's cooperative sector can serve as a worker-centric model of development. Discuss the role of the Ministry of Cooperation in strengthening the cooperative sector. Also examine the challenges associated with this approach.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's engineering education needs a reset in the AI era

Source: The post "**India's engineering education needs a reset in the AI era**" has been created based on "**India's engineering education needs a reset in the AI era**" published in "**Indian Express**" on **8th July 2026**.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2- Governance

Context: Engineering education is the foundation of India's ambitions in Artificial Intelligence (AI), semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and the digital economy. However, despite the growing demand for skilled engineers, a large number of engineering institutions are facing declining admissions, poor employability, and weak academic standards. Therefore, India must reform its engineering education ecosystem to produce globally competitive engineers.

Challenges Faced by Engineering Education

1. Declining Quality of Institutions

- a. A large number of engineering colleges suffer from weak faculty, outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, and poor academic standards.
- b. As a result, the AICTE has placed several engineering colleges under progressive closure due to persistent non-compliance with regulatory norms.

2. Poor Employability of Graduates

- a. Many engineering graduates do not possess the practical and technical skills required by modern industries.
- b. Consequently, there is a significant gap between industry expectations and the capabilities of engineering graduates.

3. Outdated Curriculum

- a. The curriculum in many institutions has not been updated to reflect emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, data science, cybersecurity, robotics, and semiconductor design.
- b. Furthermore, excessive reliance on rote learning limits innovation and problem-solving skills among students.

4. Demand-Supply Imbalance

- a. Student preference has shifted towards Computer Science and AI-related disciplines, while traditional branches such as Mechanical and Electrical Engineering have witnessed declining enrolments.
- b. Consequently, many seats in traditional engineering programmes remain vacant every year.

5. Financial Unsustainability of Colleges

- a. Declining admissions have reduced the financial viability of many engineering institutions.
- b. Therefore, several colleges have been forced to undergo progressive closure to protect students' interests.

Reforms Required

1. Modernise the Curriculum

- a. Engineering curricula should be updated regularly to include emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, data science, cybersecurity, semiconductor design, robotics, and sustainability.
- b. At the same time, institutions should continue to provide strong foundations in mathematics, science, and core engineering subjects.

2. Promote Competency-Based Education

- a. Institutions should shift from rote learning to competency-based education through project-based learning, interdisciplinary problem-solving, research, and design thinking.
- b. This approach will improve innovation, creativity, and practical skills among students.

3. Strengthen Industry-Academia Collaboration

- a. Engineering institutions should increase internships, industry projects, and collaborative research programmes with industries.
- b. Such collaboration will ensure that graduates acquire industry-relevant skills and improve their employability.

4. Adopt Outcome-Based Regulation

- a. Regulatory authorities should evaluate institutions based on graduate employability, research output, innovation, patents, startups, and industry engagement rather than only infrastructure and faculty strength.
- b. This will improve the overall quality and accountability of engineering education.

5. Improve Faculty Quality and Research

- a. Institutions should invest in faculty development programmes and promote research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.
- b. Better faculty and stronger research ecosystems will enhance the global competitiveness of engineering education.

Conclusion: India's engineering education system must shift from **quantity to quality, compliance to outcomes, and capacity expansion to global competitiveness**. A future-ready engineering ecosystem that is aligned with industry needs and emerging technologies will enable India to achieve its ambition of becoming a global technology and innovation leader in the AI era.

Question: India's aspiration to become a global technology powerhouse depends on transforming its engineering education ecosystem." Discuss the challenges faced by engineering education in India and suggest reforms required to make it future-ready in the AI era.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

India's Economic Prospects after the West Asian Crisis

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian Economy

Introduction

The easing of the West Asian crisis after the US-Iran preliminary 14-point MoU and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz have improved India's economic outlook for 2026-27. Lower crude oil prices have eased pressure on inflation, fiscal management and the external sector. However, weak monsoon conditions, fertilizer shortages and continuing geopolitical uncertainties remain major risks. India now needs balanced policies to strengthen growth and improve long-term economic resilience.

Improving Global Environment and India's Economic Outlook

1. **West Asian ceasefire improves global stability:** The **US-Iran preliminary 14-point MoU** and the reopening of the **Strait of Hormuz** have reduced risks to global trade and energy markets. If peace continues, crude oil supplies are expected to remain stable.
2. **Crude oil prices have declined sharply:** The Indian crude oil basket fell from **\$114.5 per barrel in April 2026** to **\$106.2 in May** and **\$86.3 by June 24, 2026**. Brent crude also declined to around **\$70 per barrel**, reducing inflationary pressure.
3. **Global outlook has become more favourable:** Lower geopolitical tensions have improved global growth prospects and eased pressure on central banks and emerging market currencies. However, war-risk premiums still remain due to occasional skirmishes.
4. **India enters FY27 with a strong growth base:** **GDP grew by 7.7%** and **real Gross Value Added (GVA) by 7.9%** in 2025-26, with manufacturing, trade, transport, financial services and real estate recording growth of more than **10%**.
5. **Growth is expected to remain resilient in 2026-27:** The **RBI** has projected **6.6% real GDP growth** despite the impact of higher crude prices during the first quarter and weak monsoon conditions.
6. **High-frequency indicators support economic resilience:** **Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), automobile sales, fuel consumption (excluding LPG), UPI transactions, electricity demand and credit growth** remained strong. Industries such as airlines, ceramics and fertilisers are expected to recover as supply chains normalise.

Key Risks to India's Economic Recovery

1. **Weak monsoon remains the biggest domestic risk:** The **India Meteorological Department** estimated a **10% rainfall shortfall** against the Long Period Average, while the shortfall reached nearly **43% up to June 24, 2026**. As of **July 2**, all-India rainfall remained **33.5% below normal**.
2. **Agricultural production faces pressure:** The combination of **El Niño** and fertilizer shortages may reduce agricultural output during **2026-27**. Both **kharif** and **rabi** crops may be affected.
3. **Delayed sowing may weaken rural demand:** Lower rainfall has slowed the sowing of **paddy, oilseeds and pulses**. This could reduce rural demand during the second half of the financial year.
4. **Fertilizer availability needs attention:** Limited natural gas supplies increased the cost of urea imports and created concerns over fertilizer availability. Building fertilizer reserves and addressing shortages for key crops has become important.
5. **Crop trade policies may require review:** Possible shortages of important crops may require reconsideration of crop-specific import and export policies. This can help reduce supply pressures if production weakens.
6. **Peace in West Asia remains an important assumption:** India's economic outlook depends on continued stability in West Asia. If the conflict resumes, India and many other countries may face serious economic difficulties once again.

Inflation, Fiscal Position and External Sector

1. **Inflation pressures are expected to moderate:** Lower crude oil prices are likely to keep **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)** around 6% and **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** around 4.5%, resulting in an estimated **Implicit Price Deflator (IPD)** inflation of 5.4%.
2. **Higher nominal GDP supports revenue growth:** With 6.6% real GDP growth and 5.4% IPD inflation, nominal GDP growth may reach about 12.4%, exceeding the Budget estimate of 10.1% and supporting tax collections.
3. **Fiscal position remains manageable despite pressures:** Excise duty cuts and higher fertilizer subsidies have increased expenditure, but the **RBI dividend of ₹2.69 lakh crore** will support government finances. The fiscal deficit is expected to remain close to the budgeted 4.3% of GDP.
4. **Tax collections remain encouraging:** Gross GST collections recorded their strongest growth since **September 2025**, while net direct tax collections reached ₹5.21 lakh crore by **June 15**, growing 15% year-on-year.
5. **External sector has improved:** The **current account deficit** is expected to remain around 1.5% of GDP, lower than the earlier estimate of 2.1%, while the rupee and bond markets have recovered after the ceasefire.

Sector-wise Impact on the Indian Economy

1. **Petroleum economy remains import-dependent:** India's crude oil import dependence has increased to **more than 90% in 2025-26** from 54.9% in 1998-99. Domestic crude production has fallen to 26 MMT from its peak of 35.9 MMT in 2011-12.
2. **Demand for petroleum products continues to rise:** Domestic consumption of petroleum products increased from 90.6 MMT in 1998-99 to 243.2 MMT in 2025-26. This has increased the need for larger crude imports.
3. **Refining capacity supports energy security:** India has steadily expanded its crude oil refining capacity. This reduces refining costs compared with directly importing refined petroleum products.
4. **Manufacturing and industrial activity stayed strong:** The Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) remained among the strongest globally. The revised **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** methodology better reflected strong industrial production and supported healthy GVA growth.
5. **Consumption recovered after supply disruptions:** Petrol and diesel consumption improved in June as restrictions eased, while **LPG** demand remained weak because of supply disruptions. Vehicle sales also remained healthy during the month.
6. **Some service sectors faced temporary stress:** The aviation sector experienced lower passenger traffic because of higher ATF prices, leading to route cancellations. Corporate bond markets recovered in June as credit spreads narrowed and competitiveness improved.
7. **Government spending gained momentum:** Revenue expenditure increased due to higher fertilizer subsidies and a **23% rise in interest payments**. Capital expenditure also strengthened, with spending by the **Railways** and **Defence** ministries increasing by 34% and 28%, respectively.

Way Forward

1. **Build strategic reserves:** Lower crude prices provide an opportunity to increase reserves of crude oil, fertilizers and other critical primary commodities. A long-term policy should define reserve levels and the required infrastructure.
2. **Diversify crude import sources:** India should reduce its dependence on imports passing through the **Strait of Hormuz**. Expanding the number of supplier countries can improve energy security.
3. **Strengthen domestic energy capacity:** Greater focus is needed on domestic crude oil exploration as import dependence continues to rise. India should also accelerate the shift towards greener energy sources, including **nuclear power**.
4. **Protect agriculture from supply risks:** Fertilizer reserves should be strengthened and shortages should be addressed quickly. Crop-specific import and export policies may need adjustment if production declines.
5. **Maintain fiscal stability:** Corporate tax collections, import-related GST, disinvestment and asset monetisation will remain important while excise duty collections recover. This can help balance higher subsidy expenditure.
6. **Promote energy-efficient growth:** The declining energy intensity of output and petroleum use in GDP should be sustained. This will support long-term economic growth with lower energy dependence.

Conclusion

The easing of the West Asian crisis has improved India's economic outlook through lower crude prices, easing inflation and stronger fiscal and external conditions. However, this outlook depends on continued peace in West Asia. India should strengthen energy security, build strategic reserves, protect agriculture from climate-related risks and maintain fiscal discipline to sustain stable and resilient economic growth in the coming years.

Question for practice

Examine the impact of the easing of the West Asian crisis on India's economic prospects, and discuss the key risks and policy measures needed to sustain long-term economic resilience.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Linking Women's Incomes and Healthcare

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

Introduction

India is experiencing both rising **female labour force participation** and an increasing burden of **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**. While healthcare policy has traditionally focused on expanding medical

services, growing evidence shows that **women's economic empowerment can also influence household health decisions**. Higher incomes earned by women encourage greater investment in nutrition, preventive care and healthier lifestyles, making economic empowerment an important factor in improving long-term public health.

India's Twin Transformations

1. **Rising Women's Workforce Participation:** Female labour force participation has increased sharply in recent years. Greater formalisation, digital payments and government initiatives have supported women's entry into the workforce.
2. **Changing Disease Burden:** India is no longer dealing mainly with infectious diseases. Diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and mental health disorders now account for most deaths and increase pressure on households and public finances.
3. **A Hidden Link Between Two Changes:** Economic and health transitions are often treated separately. New research shows that both developments may be closely connected through household decision-making.
4. **Importance of Women's Economic Role:** Higher incomes for women can reshape household decision-making. This suggests that women's economic participation is closely linked with better household health outcomes.

Beyond Healthcare Spending: Creating Better Health

1. **Healthcare Is More Than Medical Treatment:** Progress in healthcare is usually measured through hospitals, doctors, insurance and healthcare spending. These remain important for improving access and saving lives.
2. **Role of Preventive Investments:** Good health also depends on better nutrition, healthier lifestyles, preventive care, education, sanitation and informed household decisions. These factors reduce the chances of illness before treatment becomes necessary.
3. **Ayushman Bharat and Primary Healthcare:** Ayushman Bharat has expanded financial protection for millions of households. Improvements in primary healthcare infrastructure have also contributed to better health outcomes.
4. **Lower Spending Can Mean Better Health:** A fall in healthcare expenditure does not always indicate poor healthcare access. It may show that families are preventing diseases and therefore need less medical treatment.

Evidence Linking Women's Income and Household Health Decisions

1. **Natural Experiment Through EPF Reform:** The 2018 Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) reform reduced mandatory provident fund contributions for newly employed women in the formal sector from 12% to 8% during their first three years of employment. This increased women's take-home salary without changing their gross wages.

2. **Shift in Household Spending:** Female-led households benefiting from the reform reduced overall healthcare expenditure by about 11.6%. Spending on medicines and doctors' consultations declined, while spending on nutrition and physical fitness increased.
3. **Medical Evidence Supports Preventive Spending:** Electronic medical records from one of India's largest eye hospital systems also showed lower healthcare expenditure among women receiving the income increase. This reflected greater investment in prevention and healthier living rather than lower value placed on healthcare.
4. **Women's Income Changes Household Priorities:** Earlier studies show that income received by women increases household investment in education, nutrition and children's wellbeing. The new findings show a similar pattern in healthcare, where women invest early to reduce future health risks instead of waiting for illness.

Policy Implications for India's Development

1. **Women's Employment Supports Better Health:** India's demographic dividend depends on creating jobs for women and improving family health together. Higher female incomes can increase spending on nutrition, preventive care and healthier lifestyles.
2. **Employment Policy Becomes Health Policy:** Policies that strengthen women's economic agency can improve public health along with labour market outcomes. Their benefits go beyond employment alone.
3. **Reducing Pressure on Healthcare Financing:** Better preventive health practices can reduce future illness and lower dependence on healthcare services. This can also reduce pressure on India's healthcare system, where out-of-pocket expenditure remains a significant source of healthcare financing.
4. **Creating Health Instead of Buying Healthcare:** Households can improve health by investing in nutrition, healthier lifestyles and preventive care instead of depending mainly on medical treatment.
5. **Healthcare Spending Is Not a Complete Measure:** Lower expenditure on healthcare should not always be seen as neglect. It may reflect fewer illnesses because households have invested more in prevention.

Conclusion

India's focus on **preventive healthcare** and healthier lifestyles should also promote **women's economic empowerment**. Higher women's incomes encourage greater investment in long-term health instead of only medical treatment. These different household spending decisions can improve family wellbeing, reduce pressure on the healthcare system and become an important investment in India's public health.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the role of women's economic empowerment in improving household health outcomes and promoting preventive healthcare in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India and Japan must build Asia's defining partnership

Source: The post "India and Japan must build Asia's defining partnership" has been created based on "Shashi Tharoor writes: India and Japan must build Asia's defining partnership" published in "Indian Express" on 9th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2 – International Relations

Context: India and Japan share a **Special Strategic and Global Partnership** based on common democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and a shared vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. In the present era of geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, and technological competition, the India-Japan partnership has become increasingly significant for regional stability and sustainable development.

Significance of the India-Japan Partnership

1. Strengthening Economic Cooperation

- a. The 16th India-Japan Annual Summit resulted in **\$12.5 billion** of fresh Japanese investment in India's infrastructure and manufacturing sectors.
- b. The signing of **129 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** with participation from more than **150 Japanese companies** reflects the growing economic partnership between the two countries.
- c. These investments will strengthen India's manufacturing ecosystem and promote long-term industrial growth.

2. Building Resilient Supply Chains

- a. India and Japan are collaborating to develop resilient supply chains in sectors such as semiconductors, telecommunications, and critical minerals.
- b. This cooperation will reduce dependence on single-source supply chains and improve economic security against global disruptions.

3. Enhancing Defence and Strategic Cooperation

- a. The partnership includes joint manufacturing and co-development of advanced defence equipment.
- b. Both countries have initiated their first military hardware co-development project focusing on **Unified Complex Radio Antenna (UNICORN) masts** for naval platforms.
- c. Discussions on the future co-production of **Mogami-class stealth frigates** demonstrate the growing defence partnership.
- d. Through the Quad, India and Japan are promoting a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific while respecting national sovereignty.

4. Promoting Technology and Clean Energy Cooperation

- a. Both countries are cooperating in areas such as Artificial Intelligence safety standards, digital governance, and technological innovation.

- b. They have also agreed to work together on green ammonia production and the establishment of **1,000 regional biogas plants**, thereby supporting clean energy transition.

5. Leveraging Demographic Complementarity

- a. Japan is facing a shrinking workforce due to an ageing population, whereas India has a large and youthful workforce.
- b. A structured talent mobility framework can help Indian professionals address Japan's labour shortages while generating employment opportunities for Indian youth.
- c. Such cooperation should include cultural orientation and institutional mechanisms to protect migrant workers.

6. Developing a Joint Care Economy

- a. Japan has developed advanced expertise in eldercare, rehabilitative robotics, and age-friendly infrastructure.
- b. India can benefit from Japan's experience through joint research, technology transfer, and collaborative projects to prepare for its own ageing population in the future.

7. Promoting Women's Economic Participation

- a. India and Japan can create structured employment opportunities for Indian women in Japan's care sector.
- b. Safe housing, career progression, skill certification, and harassment-free workplaces will improve female labour force participation while addressing Japan's care-sector workforce shortages.

8. Supporting Inclusive Economic Development

- a. Japan's post-war development model demonstrates that sustainable prosperity depends on expanding a strong middle class.
- b. India can replicate this approach by promoting manufacturing hubs, logistics networks, and technological infrastructure in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- c. Such cooperation will promote balanced regional development and increase upward social mobility.

Challenges

- 1. Demographic and Cultural Differences:** Differences in language, work culture, and social integration continue to limit the movement of Indian professionals to Japan.
- 2. Slow Project Implementation:** Infrastructure and investment projects often face delays due to administrative procedures and regulatory bottlenecks.
- 3. Skill Gap:** Many Indian workers require specialised technical training and Japanese language proficiency to meet Japan's labour market requirements.
- 4. Geopolitical Uncertainty:** Rising regional tensions and strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific may create challenges for deeper cooperation.

5. Limited Trade Potential: Despite strong political relations, bilateral trade remains below its full potential and requires greater diversification.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Economic Integration: India and Japan should accelerate investments in manufacturing, logistics, and industrial corridors to deepen economic cooperation.

2. Expand Talent Mobility: Both countries should establish structured migration pathways with language training, skill development, and strong worker protection mechanisms.

3. Deepen Defence Cooperation: The two countries should increase defence co-production, technology transfer, and regular military exercises to strengthen regional security.

4. Promote Technology and Innovation: Greater collaboration in semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence, digital public infrastructure, robotics, and clean energy should be encouraged.

5. Improve Ease of Doing Business: India should simplify regulatory procedures and ensure timely implementation of Japanese investment projects.

6. Promote Inclusive Development: Both countries should focus investments on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities to create employment opportunities and strengthen India's middle class.

Conclusion: India and Japan have transformed their relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership based on shared democratic values, economic cooperation, technological innovation, and regional security. By addressing existing challenges and expanding cooperation in critical sectors, both countries can build a resilient, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific while contributing to long-term peace, prosperity, and sustainable development in Asia.

Question: India-Japan relations have evolved beyond economic cooperation into a comprehensive strategic partnership. Discuss the significance of this partnership in the changing Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape. Also examine the challenges and suggest a way forward.

Source: Indian Express

What is the right to be forgotten?

Source: The post "What is the right to be forgotten? | Explained" has been created based on "What is the right to be forgotten?" published in "The Hindu" on 9th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2 – Polity & Governance

Context: The **Right to be Forgotten (RTBF)** is the right of an individual to have personal information erased or de-indexed from the public digital space when its continued availability causes harm and no longer serves a legitimate public interest. The recent **Delhi High Court judgment (Laksh Vir Singh Yadav v. Union of India, 2026)** has laid down a structured framework for balancing privacy with open justice and freedom of expression.

About the Right to be Forgotten

1. The Right to be Forgotten allows individuals to seek the removal or de-indexing of personal information from digital platforms when its continued accessibility violates their privacy and dignity.
2. The concept gained global recognition after the **2014 European Court of Justice judgment in the Mario Costeja González case**, which later became part of **Article 17 of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**.

Evolution in India

1. The **Supreme Court in K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** recognised privacy as a fundamental right under **Article 21**, including the right to informational privacy.
2. Different High Courts adopted varying approaches regarding anonymisation and removal of personal information due to the absence of a uniform legal framework.
3. The recent Delhi High Court judgment attempts to provide such a framework.

Key Features of the Delhi High Court Judgment

1. The Court held that the Right to be Forgotten flows from **Article 21**, which guarantees dignity and informational privacy.
2. The Court introduced a **proportionality test**, requiring that retention of information must serve a legitimate purpose and that privacy harm must be balanced against public interest.
3. The Court preferred **masking or redaction of parties' names** instead of deleting entire judicial records.
4. The Court directed legal databases to comply with such orders within **two weeks**.
5. The judgment clarified that judicial records would remain accessible through case numbers or keyword searches, while restricting name-based searches.

Significance of the Judgment

1. The judgment strengthens the constitutional right to privacy and protects individuals from long-term digital harm.
2. It balances privacy with the principles of open justice and freedom of speech.
3. It protects individuals who have been acquitted or whose disputes have been settled from continuing social stigma.
4. It establishes a structured legal framework for handling future RTBF cases.

Challenges

- 1. Balancing Fundamental Rights:** The Right to be Forgotten may conflict with **Article 19(1)(a)**, which guarantees freedom of speech and the public's right to know.
- 2. Enforcement Difficulties:** Information may continue to appear through mirror websites, archives, cached pages, and social media despite court orders.
- 3. Search Engine Limitations:** De-indexing removes search results but does not permanently erase the original content from the internet.

4. Inadequate Legal Framework: The **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** provides only a limited right to erasure based on consent and does not specifically address judicial records or public archives.

5. Institutional Gaps: The Data Protection Board is not fully operational, and the DPDP Rules are yet to be notified, limiting effective implementation.

Way Forward

1. A comprehensive legal framework should clearly define the scope and limits of the Right to be Forgotten.
2. The DPDP Act should be strengthened to explicitly cover judicial records and digital archives where appropriate.
3. The Data Protection Board should be made fully functional to ensure timely and transparent decision-making.
4. A tiered mechanism should be adopted, where routine requests are handled by digital platforms, disputed cases by the Data Protection Board, and judicial matters by courts.
5. Stronger coordination among courts, search engines, legal databases, and social media platforms should be established to ensure effective compliance.
6. The Supreme Court should provide authoritative guidelines to ensure uniform implementation across the country.

Conclusion: The Delhi High Court judgment marks a significant step in protecting informational privacy while preserving open justice and freedom of expression. However, effective implementation will require a robust legal framework, operational institutions, technological cooperation, and clear judicial guidance to ensure that the Right to be Forgotten becomes a meaningful constitutional safeguard rather than merely a declaratory right.

Question: What is the Right to be Forgotten (RTBF)? Discuss the recent Delhi High Court judgment on the Right to be Forgotten, its significance, challenges, and the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Indian Diaspora as Australia's Identity, Its Future

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Indian diaspora.

Introduction

India has become **Australia's largest overseas-born community**, overtaking the England-born population for the first time. This marks a historic change in Australia's demographic profile and national identity. The Indian diaspora has become an important pillar of Australia-India relations. At the same time, its rapid growth has raised new social, political and policy challenges. The future of this partnership depends on understanding the diaspora beyond numbers and strengthening social cohesion.

Demographic Shift in Australia

1. **India becomes the largest overseas-born community:** India has overtaken **England** as the largest source of overseas-born Australians. This is the first time a **non-British-origin** migrant community has become the country's largest diaspora.
2. **A changing national identity:** Australia was shaped by a British-derived majority for nearly two centuries. The rise of the Indian-origin community reflects a lasting shift towards a more multicultural and Indo-Pacific identity.
3. **A young diaspora with a different migration history:** Large-scale Indian migration started mainly in the **1960s and 1970s** after the end of the **White Australia Policy**. Compared to the Indian communities in the **U.S. and U.K.**, the Australian Indian diaspora is relatively young.
4. **Strong links with India:** Many recent migrants arrived after **2014** during a period of higher outward migration from India. They remain closely connected with India through **families, businesses, remittances and cultural identity**.
5. **A permanent demographic transformation:** The growth of the Indian community is not a temporary trend. It reflects a long-term change that will continue to influence Australia's society and national identity.

Evolution of India–Australia Relations

1. **From Three Cs to Four Ds:** The relationship has moved beyond **Cricket, Curry and Commonwealth** to **Democracy, Defence, Diaspora and Dosti**. This reflects deeper political and strategic cooperation.
2. **Strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific:** India and Australia have strengthened cooperation through the **Quad** with the **United States** and **Japan**. Defence and regional security have become central to bilateral relations.
3. **Diaspora becomes a strategic pillar:** The Indian community is no longer viewed only as a cultural link. It has become an important bridge connecting both countries at the social, political and economic levels.
4. **Growing political importance of the diaspora:** Public events such as '**Melbourne Meets Modi**' show that the Indian community has become politically and diplomatically significant. It now attracts attention from both governments and the wider public.

Contributions of the Indian Diaspora

1. **Supporting Australia's multicultural society:** The Indian diaspora strengthens Australia's multicultural character. It has become an important part of the country's changing social identity.
2. **Building economic and social connections:** Close family ties, business links and remittances keep strong connections between India and Australia. These networks support long-term cooperation between the two countries.
3. **Strengthening bilateral relations:** The diaspora acts as a people-to-people bridge that supports trust and engagement. It has become an important pillar of the broader Australia–India partnership.

4. **Expanding the partnership beyond economics:** The diaspora also contributes to civic, political and strategic engagement. This broadens cooperation beyond trade and migration alone.
5. **A source of national pride and partnership:** India views the diaspora as an important cultural link with Australia. At the same time, the community has become a valuable partner in strengthening bilateral relations.

Emerging Social and Political Challenges

1. **Rise of anti-immigration politics:** Australia has witnessed a growing anti-immigration wave, with campaigns such as "March for Australia" and the growing influence of the One Nation Party. The increasing size and visibility of the Indian diaspora have made it a major target in public and political debates.
2. **Changing public perception of the diaspora:** The Indian community was once mainly recognised for its economic contribution and support to multiculturalism. It is now also portrayed by some groups as creating pressure on jobs, housing, infrastructure and public services.
3. **Stereotypes ignore the diversity of the diaspora:** Indian Australians are often seen either as a "model minority" that succeeds in every field or as "surplus actors" adding pressure to the immigration system. These views ignore that the community includes people from different class, caste, language, religion, visa status and generations, whose experiences are very different.
4. **Different settlement and identity experiences:** Temporary visa holders, permanent residents and Australian-born Indians experience Australia differently. Their sense of belonging, political views, media habits and trust in institutions are not the same.
5. **Gaps in diaspora research:** Existing studies mainly measure income, education, employment and integration. They pay much less attention to trust, civic participation, democratic engagement and interactions with other communities.
6. **Threat to social cohesion:** Public debates based on stereotypes weaken trust between communities and reinforce social divisions. Excessive focus on communal identities can reduce the shared sense of belonging needed in a multicultural democracy.
7. **Weakening of long-term bilateral partnership:** Treating the diaspora mainly as a tool for trade, mobility or diplomacy overlooks its civic and political role. This limits the broader potential of the Australia-India partnership.
8. **Risk of division and foreign interference:** Without greater investment in inclusion and wellbeing, diaspora communities become more vulnerable to divisive campaigns and foreign interference. Better understanding and engagement are necessary to strengthen democratic resilience.

Policy Priorities for a Stronger Partnership

1. **Develop an evidence-based understanding of the diaspora:** Governments should move beyond measuring income, education, employment and trade. Research should also examine settlement experiences, trust in institutions, civic participation and the wellbeing of different diaspora groups.
2. **Recognise the diversity within the Indian diaspora:** Policies should acknowledge differences based on class, caste, language, religion, migration pathways and generations. Understanding these differences will help design more inclusive and effective policies.
3. **Strengthen social cohesion through bridging social capital:** Governments should promote interaction between different communities, not just within individual cultural groups. Stronger intercultural ties will build trust, reduce stereotypes and strengthen Australia's multicultural democracy.
4. **Promote inclusive engagement and democratic participation:** Governments should work closely with civil society and diaspora organisations to improve public participation, strengthen trust in institutions and encourage a stronger sense of belonging.
5. **Treat the diaspora as a long-term strategic partner:** The Indian diaspora should be recognised as an active stakeholder in the Australia-India partnership, not merely as a symbol of bilateral relations. Greater investment in its inclusion will strengthen long-term cooperation and reduce the risk of social divisions and foreign interference.

Conclusion

The rise of the **Indian diaspora** marks a historic shift in Australia's demographic profile and national identity. Its growing role has strengthened the **Australia-India partnership**, but it has also exposed new social and political challenges. Building **social cohesion, trust, evidence-based policies and bridging social capital** is essential for ensuring that the diaspora remains a lasting pillar of democracy, multiculturalism and long-term strategic cooperation rather than merely a demographic or diplomatic symbol.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

How India Withstood the Crisis in West Asia

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and infrastructure

Introduction

India has historically faced economic instability whenever global oil prices increased sharply because it imports nearly **90% of its crude oil** and depends heavily on the Gulf for oil, gas and fertilizers. The West Asia crisis again raised fears of inflation, fuel shortages and pressure on the economy. However, unlike previous crises, India managed the disruption effectively through strategic planning, diversified energy supplies, strong diplomacy and coordinated governance, demonstrating greater energy resilience than expected.

India's Response to the Energy Shock

1. **Managing a High-Risk Energy Crisis:** The Strait of Hormuz crisis exposed India to major risks because of its dependence on imported crude oil and LPG. Rising freight charges, shipping risks and higher crude prices increased the possibility of an energy and economic shock.
2. **Preventing Inflation and Supply Disruptions:** The government's immediate priority was to prevent higher global oil prices from causing inflation and fuel shortages within the country. Continuous monitoring and supply management ensured that essential petroleum products remained available.
3. **Containing Petrol Price Increase:** India limited the increase in petrol prices to 7.5% during the crisis. This was much lower than Germany (14%), the U.K. (19%), the U.S. (45%), Pakistan and the Philippines (over 50%), and Myanmar (almost 90%).
4. **Limiting Diesel Price Rise:** Diesel prices increased by only 8% in India, while the UAE recorded an increase of nearly 85%. This reflected India's effective retail fuel price management despite higher global crude prices.
5. **Protecting LPG Consumers:** India imports nearly 60% of its LPG requirement, yet a domestic LPG cylinder remained available at ₹942, while Ujjwala beneficiaries paid ₹642. These prices remained lower than those in Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, and much lower than in the U.S., Australia and Canada.
6. **Absorbing the Cost Instead of Passing It On:** Public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) absorbed much of the global price increase instead of transferring it to consumers. They incurred ₹74,781 crore in losses on petrol, diesel and LPG sales up to June 30, helping protect household budgets.

Managing Energy Security and Economic Stability

1. **High Dependence on Imported Energy:** India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil, making it highly sensitive to disruptions in global energy markets. Dependence on Gulf countries for oil, gas and fertilizers further increased this vulnerability.
2. **Economic Risks from Global Disruptions:** Higher crude prices, rising freight costs and shipping delays had the potential to increase inflation, widen the import bill and create uncertainty in the economy. The crisis also revived memories of the 1973 oil shock and the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis.
3. **Maintaining Macroeconomic Stability:** Despite global pressures, inflation broadly remained within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target band. India also continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy, showing that external shocks did not derail overall economic stability.
4. **Balanced Energy Management:** The government followed a calibrated strategy that balanced consumer protection with macroeconomic stability. It avoided sudden fuel price increases while ensuring uninterrupted energy supplies across the country.

5. **Diversified Crude Supplies:** India reduced dependence on a single source by diversifying crude oil imports from different regions. This flexibility helped manage supply disruptions without creating major shortages.
6. **Strategic Inventory Management:** Careful inventory planning and coordination with public sector energy companies ensured continuous availability of petroleum products. This reduced the impact of temporary disruptions in global supply chains.
7. **Prudent Fuel Price Management:** Retail fuel prices were adjusted carefully instead of following every increase in international crude prices. This helped moderate inflationary pressure and protected consumers from sudden price shocks.
8. **Strong Domestic Growth Drivers:** Strong domestic demand, public investment and expanding manufacturing supported economic activity during the crisis. These factors helped the economy absorb external shocks more effectively.

Factors Behind India's Energy Resilience

1. **Strategic Diplomatic Partnerships:** India treated diplomatic relations as an important part of energy security. Decades of engagement with Iran and Gulf countries kept communication channels open even during the peak of the crisis.
2. **Support from Energy-Producing Countries:** Iran facilitated the movement of Indian ships, while Gulf producers continued supplying oil despite regional tensions. These trusted partnerships reduced the risk of supply disruptions.
3. **Diversified Energy Supplier Base:** India expanded energy partnerships beyond the Gulf to Russia, the U.S., Africa and Latin America. This reduced dependence on a single region and improved flexibility during geopolitical crises.
4. **Long-Term Energy Planning:** Investments made over the past decade strengthened India's ability to absorb external shocks. Higher ethanol blending, a growing renewable energy base, larger strategic petroleum reserves and stronger refining capacity improved energy resilience.
5. **Institutional Learning and Preparedness:** India's response reflected years of policy learning rather than short-term crisis management. Long-term planning enabled the country to respond quickly without major disruptions.
6. **Whole-of-Government Coordination:** Different ministries and national institutions worked together instead of functioning separately. This coordinated approach helped manage logistics, monitor risks and maintain uninterrupted energy supplies.
7. **Preparedness Over Panic:** The crisis showed that resilience comes from years of preparation rather than emergency decisions. Strategic foresight enabled India to handle the disruption more effectively than expected.

Government Initiatives and Institutional Coordination

1. **Integrated Government Response:** The Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Indian Navy, the National Security Council Secretariat, State governments, municipal authorities, oil marketing companies and industry associations worked together to minimise disruptions and maintain energy supplies.
2. **Expansion of Gas Infrastructure:** Continuous investment expanded India's City Gas Distribution (CGD) network from 55 geographical areas in 2014 to more than 300. This increased access to cleaner fuels and improved energy security.
3. **Promotion of Piped Natural Gas (PNG):** The government encouraged the use of PNG wherever pipeline infrastructure was available. This reduced dependence on LPG and provided greater flexibility during supply disruptions.
4. **Support for Exporters:** Exporters affected by higher freight charges, insurance costs and shipping delays received liquidity support, logistics facilitation and simplified customs procedures. These measures helped businesses continue serving international markets.
5. **Strong Export Performance:** Government support enabled exporters to maintain production and shipments despite global uncertainty. As a result, merchandise exports grew by 16% during April–May FY27.
6. **Financial Stability Measures by the RBI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) maintained comfortable liquidity, stable financial markets and a well-capitalised banking system during the crisis. These measures reduced financial uncertainty despite global volatility.
7. **Strengthening External Resilience:** Forex swap facilities, support for foreign currency deposits by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and rationalisation of taxes on Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) strengthened India's external sector and improved its ability to manage external shocks.
8. **Coordinated Fiscal, Monetary and Administrative Action:** Fiscal policy, monetary policy and administrative measures complemented each other throughout the crisis. This coordinated response preserved macroeconomic stability even when many countries faced severe inflation, fuel shortages and supply-chain disruptions.
9. **Support for Indigenous Innovation:** Scientists at CSIR's National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) developed indigenous technology to produce Dimethyl Ether (DME) as an alternative to LPG. This can reduce dependence on imported cooking fuel in the long run.
10. **Expansion of Refining Capacity:** Continuous investment strengthened India's refining capacity, enabling refineries to process different grades of crude oil without affecting fuel quality. This improved supply flexibility during disruptions.

Way Forward

1. **Continue Diversifying Energy Sources:** India should further expand energy partnerships across different regions to reduce dependence on any single supplier and strengthen supply security.

2. **Strengthen Strategic Energy Capacity:** Continued investment in strategic petroleum reserves, refining capacity, renewable energy, gas infrastructure and alternative fuels will improve preparedness against future crises.
3. **Deepen Diplomatic Engagement:** Strong and stable relations with energy-producing countries should remain a priority. Active diplomacy can help secure reliable supplies during periods of global uncertainty.
4. **Promote Technological Innovation:** Greater support for indigenous technologies such as DME and cleaner energy solutions can reduce import dependence and strengthen long-term energy resilience.
5. **Maintain Institutional Coordination:** The coordinated approach among ministries, financial institutions, security agencies and industry should continue. Strong coordination can ensure faster responses to future geopolitical disruptions.

Conclusion

India's response to the West Asia crisis showed that **strategic planning, diversified energy supplies, strong diplomacy, technological capability and coordinated governance** can reduce the impact of global disruptions. Years of preparation helped India protect consumers, maintain economic stability and strengthen energy security. This resilience can become an important pillar in achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.

Question for practice:

Discuss how India withstood the West Asia crisis despite its high dependence on imported energy, and examine the key factors that strengthened its energy security and economic resilience.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Beyond childcare, four barriers to female participation in cities

Source: The post “Beyond childcare, four barriers to female participation in cities” has been created based on “Beyond childcare, four barriers to female participation in cities” published in “Indian Express” on 10th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2- Governance

Context: The Union Government has proposed amending the **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** provisions under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**. The recent proposal seeks to replace the existing **household-based entitlement** with a **per capita entitlement of 7 kg of foodgrains per person per month**, subject to a minimum of **35 kg per household**. While the Centre argues that the change will improve equity and transparency, States such as **Tamil Nadu and Kerala** have opposed it, citing adverse impacts on poor households.

Reason behind centre proposing the amendment

1. The existing household-based entitlement provides **35 kg of foodgrains per household**, irrespective of the number of family members.
2. This system creates **inequities**, as larger families receive less food per person than smaller families.
3. The proposed **per capita model** aims to ensure a more **equitable distribution** based on family size.

4. It also seeks to make foodgrain allocation **more transparent and rational**, reducing inequalities in entitlement.
5. However, the proposal retains a **minimum entitlement of 35 kg per household** to ensure that smaller families do not receive less than the existing allocation.

Reason behind Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing the proposal

1. Reduction in allocation to many poor households

- a. Tamil Nadu and Kerala argue that many households with **fewer than five members** will receive **less than 35 kg** under the new formula.
- b. Since both States have a relatively smaller average family size, a significant number of beneficiaries would lose part of their current entitlement.

2. Wider regional disparities

- a. Southern States generally have **smaller household sizes** due to demographic transition.
- b. Consequently, they may receive **lower foodgrain allocations** compared to States with larger average family sizes.

3. Burden on State governments

- a. Tamil Nadu fears that it may have to **procure additional foodgrains from the open market** to maintain existing benefits.
- b. This would increase the **financial burden** on the State government.

4. Political and federal concerns

- a. Tamil Nadu has termed the proposal **discriminatory** and has demanded that the Centre retain the current household-based entitlement.
- b. Kerala has also expressed reservations over the proposed changes.

Issues with the existing household-based system

1. The current system benefits **small families disproportionately**, as every household receives the same quantity regardless of family size.
2. Larger households receive **less foodgrain per person**, creating inequitable outcomes.
3. According to the article, this household-based mechanism has resulted in **significant inequities depending on household size**.

Potential impact of the proposed amendment

1. Positive impacts

- a. The amendment can make foodgrain distribution **fairer on a per-person basis**.
- b. It aligns allocation more closely with the actual number of beneficiaries.
- c. It addresses long-standing inequities faced by larger households.

2. Concerns

- a. Many households with **less than five members** may receive lower monthly allocations.
- b. Southern States with **smaller family sizes** may witness a decline in their total foodgrain allocation.
- c. The proposal may deepen **regional disparities** if demographic differences are not considered.

Way Forward

1. The Centre should evolve the amendment through **consultation and consensus** with States.
2. Foodgrain allocation should balance **equity with regional demographic realities**.
3. A **middle path** can be considered by retaining the **minimum entitlement of 35 kg per family**, irrespective of family size, while gradually moving towards a fairer distribution model.
4. Cooperative federalism should guide reforms to ensure that **no State or beneficiary is disproportionately affected**.

Conclusion: The proposed revision seeks to make foodgrain allocation under NFSA more equitable by adopting a per capita approach. However, concerns regarding regional disparities, fiscal burden on States, and the impact on small households need careful consideration. A balanced, consultative approach is essential to ensure that reforms strengthen both **food security and cooperative federalism**.

Question: The proposed revision to the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) has triggered concerns over equity and regional disparities. Examine the rationale behind the proposal and discuss the concerns raised by States.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?

Source: The post “**Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?**” has been created based on “**Why is the Centre revising the NFSA?**” published in “The Hindu” on 10th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2- Governance

Context: The latest **National Statistics Office (NSO)** report shows encouraging progress in women's economic participation in urban India. Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in million-plus cities has increased from **19.8% in 2017-18 to 27.2% in 2025**. Women are also increasingly becoming entrepreneurs, with **over 20% of unincorporated establishments** being run by women in **32 out of 46 million-plus cities**. However, female LFPR remains significantly lower than the male LFPR of **75.9%**, indicating persistent structural barriers.

Positive Trends

1. Rising Female Labour Force Participation: Female LFPR has witnessed the highest increase among all demographic groups. Cities have emerged as important centres of employment opportunities for women.

2. Growth in Women Entrepreneurship: Women are increasingly establishing and managing businesses. Cities such as **Surat, Vadodara and Pune** have nearly **40% of unincorporated establishments** run by women.

Major Barriers Beyond Childcare

1. Mobility and Safe Transportation

- a. Women's participation begins with their ability to travel safely to work.
- b. More than half of women report experiencing harassment or feeling unsafe while using public transport.
- c. Women often undertake **chained journeys**, combining work with childcare and household responsibilities.
- d. Urban transport systems remain designed primarily for simple home-to-office commutes, failing to address women's travel patterns.
- e. Unsafe and unreliable transport discourages women from entering the labour market.

2. Limited Access to Public Spaces

- a. Women often feel that they need a legitimate reason to occupy public spaces.
- b. They are less likely to use parks, cafés or streets freely compared to men.
- c. The issue extends beyond physical safety and reflects unequal social norms.
- d. Cities need to be designed with the assumption that women are equal participants in public life.

3. Barriers to Career Progression

- a. Women continue to face difficulties in reaching leadership positions despite entering the workforce.
- b. Only **5% of NSE-500 companies** are led by women.
- c. Career stagnation is not explained solely by maternity or caregiving responsibilities.
- d. Unconscious bias influences promotion decisions.
- e. Leadership traits such as assertiveness are often viewed positively in men but negatively in women.
- f. Women also tend to apply for jobs only after meeting nearly all eligibility criteria, while men often apply after meeting around **60%** of the qualifications.
- g. Supporting women in leadership expands the talent pool and strengthens merit rather than compromising it.

4. Limited Access to Finance

- a. Women-led MSMEs face a **credit gap of around 35%**.
- b. Limited collateral, lower property ownership and weaker financial literacy restrict access to institutional credit.
- c. Less than **5% of venture capital funding** in India goes to start-ups with a woman founder.
- d. Investors often ask women founders risk-focused "prevention" questions, while men receive growth-oriented "promotion" questions, creating funding biases.

Way Forward

1. Urban transport should be made **safe, reliable and gender-responsive**, keeping women's travel patterns in mind.

2. Public spaces should be designed to ensure that women can participate freely and confidently in city life.
3. Organisations should promote **gender-sensitive leadership policies**, eliminate unconscious bias and ensure equal opportunities for career advancement.
4. Financial institutions should improve women's access to **credit, collateral-free loans, venture capital and financial literacy programmes**.
5. Affordable childcare facilities should continue to be strengthened alongside broader structural reforms.
6. Urban planning should adopt a **gender-inclusive approach** so that cities become truly enabling spaces for women.

Conclusion: Urban India has created new opportunities for women through rising employment and entrepreneurship. However, mobility constraints, exclusion from public spaces, workplace bias and unequal access to finance continue to limit women's economic participation. Addressing these structural barriers through gender-responsive governance and inclusive urban planning is essential to achieving genuine economic empowerment and inclusive growth.

Question: Despite a rise in female labour force participation in urban India, structural barriers continue to limit women's economic empowerment. Discuss the key challenges and suggest measures to improve women's participation in cities.

Source: The Hindu

Building a Durable India–Australia Partnership

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Australia visit (8–10 July 2026) marked another important milestone in strengthening the India–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). The visit reflected growing strategic convergence between the two countries through new initiatives in defence, maritime security, trade, technology, energy and people-to-people ties. The larger challenge now is to convert this shared strategic understanding into lasting institutional alignment through practical cooperation, stronger implementation and sustained public trust.

Why the India–Australia Partnership Matters

1. **Shared Strategic Vision:** Both countries are responding to a rapidly changing global environment by strengthening their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. They seek to promote peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific through closer cooperation.
2. **The Partnership is Moving Beyond Shared Interests:** India and Australia are no longer limiting cooperation to common strategic thinking. They are creating institutional mechanisms, such as the Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap, and PACTS, to build a durable partnership.

3. **Reducing Strategic Dependence:** Australia wants to diversify beyond economic dependence on China and alliance dependence on the United States. India is also reducing dependence by diversifying energy suppliers, defence platforms and critical mineral processing.
4. **Managing an Uncertain Global Order:** The Iran and Ukraine conflicts have shown that dependence on a single partner has become risky. India and Australia recognise that cooperation with trusted partners improves their strategic resilience.
5. **Strong Political Commitment:** The bilateral relationship enjoys bipartisan support in Australia. Regular leadership meetings, ministerial engagements and economic roadmaps demonstrate sustained political commitment from both governments.
6. **A Trusted Regional Partnership:** India remains a trusted security partner rather than a military ally. This allows both countries to deepen cooperation while maintaining their independent foreign policies.

Major Developments in India–Australia Partnership

1. **Strengthened Defence Cooperation:** The two Prime Ministers announced a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation to deepen defence ties and enhance regional security. An Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue will further strengthen regular consultations.
2. **Expanded Maritime Security Framework:** A Memorandum of Understanding between Australia's Maritime Border Command and the Indian Coast Guard and the India–Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap will improve information sharing, operational coordination and maritime security.
3. **Operational Nuclear Cooperation:** Australian uranium exports to India became operational after reforms under the SHANTI Act enabled implementation of the earlier civil nuclear agreement. Both countries also signed arrangements for longterm peaceful uranium exports under IAEA safeguards.
4. **Launch of PACTS:** The Australia–India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS) was launched to strengthen cooperation in cyber security, digital resilience, critical technologies, defence research and resilient supply chains.
5. **Technology and Innovation Partnerships:** The leaders reaffirmed the complementary role of the Australia–Canada–India Technology and Innovation Partnership (ACITI). They also agreed to explore a bilateral innovation framework linking governments, industries, universities and research institutions.
6. **Economic and Business Engagement:** Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to progressing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). They also encouraged stronger business partnerships through the CEO Forum, private investment and continued implementation of Australia's economic roadmap for India.
7. **Growing Defence Industry Cooperation:** Defence cooperation is expanding beyond military exercises to defence manufacturing, research, logistics, military education and industry partnerships.

Efforts are also underway to strengthen collaboration through defence trade missions and institutional exchanges.

Key Areas of Cooperation in the India–Australia Partnership

1. **Maritime Security:** Both countries consider the Indian Ocean central to their strategic interests. They are expanding cooperation in maritime domain awareness, information sharing, capability development and operational coordination to ensure secure sea lanes.
2. **Defence and Security:** Defence cooperation now covers all domains through joint exercises, logistics support, military education, defence research and interoperability with trusted partners. Both countries also aim to strengthen defence industries and innovation.
3. **Trade, Investment and Economic Security:** Bilateral trade has grown under the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA). Both sides are working towards CECA, reducing non-tariff barriers, increasing investment and strengthening business-to-business cooperation.
4. **Critical Minerals and Supply Chains:** India and Australia are promoting partnerships in critical minerals through government agencies, industries and research institutions. They also seek secure long-term supply arrangements and stronger processing capabilities to improve economic security.
5. **Energy and Climate Cooperation:** Both countries are strengthening cooperation in energy security, renewable energy and electrification. They also support climate action through the Paris Agreement, climate finance, technology transfer and initiatives under the India–Australia Renewable Energy Partnership.
6. **Technology, Space and Innovation:** Cooperation is expanding in cyber security, critical technologies, digital resilience, space research and innovation. Australia continues supporting India's Gaganyaan programme while both countries promote industry and research partnerships.
7. **Education, Skills and People-to-People Links:** The growing Indian community, now Australia's largest overseas-born group, remains central to bilateral relations. Cooperation is expanding through Australian university campuses in India, skill development, parliamentary exchanges and the Maitri grants for stronger people-to-people ties.
8. **Regional and Multilateral Cooperation:** India and Australia work together through the Quad, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), Australia–India–Indonesia trilateral mechanism, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and ASEAN-led institutions. They also support UN Security Council reforms and stronger cooperation against terrorism.

Key Challenges

1. **Converting Convergence into Alignment:** India and Australia have developed strong strategic convergence, but long-term success depends on converting it into practical cooperation through institutions, regular mechanisms and operational partnerships.

2. **Different Strategic Priorities:** Both countries share interests in the Indian Ocean, but their broader defence priorities remain different. Australia continues to focus heavily on the Western Pacific through AUKUS, while India must balance both continental and maritime security challenges.
3. **Limited Operational Integration:** New agreements have narrowed the gap between strategic intent and practical cooperation, but deeper interoperability and sustained operational coordination are still required for durable alignment.
4. **Uneven Benefits from Trade:** Trade has expanded after the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) came into force, but many smaller exporters remain unaware of its opportunities. This operational gap limits wider business participation.
5. **Low Public Awareness of India's Strategic Role:** Public understanding of India's global importance remains limited in Australia. The Lowy Institute Poll found that only 5% of Australians expect India to become the world's most important power in the next decade, compared to 54% for China.
6. **Untapped Potential of the Indian Diaspora:** The Indian diaspora is widely recognised for its contribution, but its strengths have not been fully institutionalised to support business cooperation, public awareness and long-term strategic engagement.
7. **Migration-Related Concerns:** Greater mobility of Indian professionals should be encouraged, but it must also be managed alongside Australia's increasingly sensitive domestic migration politics.

Future Priorities

1. **Institutionalise Strategic Alignment:** Future cooperation should focus on strengthening long-term institutions, regular dialogues and practical mechanisms that make the partnership more durable than leadership-level convergence alone.
2. **Deepen Maritime Cooperation:** Both countries should fully implement the India–Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap by expanding information sharing, capacity building, operational coordination and maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
3. **Expand Economic Integration:** Completing the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), promoting investment and increasing awareness among small businesses can unlock the full economic potential of the partnership.
4. **Strengthen Critical Technology Partnerships:** Greater cooperation in cyber security, critical technologies, defence research, innovation and resilient supply chains should remain a priority under PACTS and related technology partnerships.
5. **Build Stronger Energy and Critical Mineral Partnerships:** Long-term cooperation in uranium exports, renewable energy, critical minerals and secure supply chains can strengthen both countries' economic and energy security.

6. **Leverage the Indian Diaspora:** The Indian community should become a stronger bridge for trade, investment, education and business cooperation, especially by helping Australian and Indian SMEs understand each other's business and regulatory environment.
7. **Promote a Stable Indo-Pacific:** India and Australia should continue working through the Quad, IORA, IPOI, ASEAN-led institutions and other regional platforms to support a free, open, rules-based, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific, while strengthening cooperation against terrorism and supporting multilateral reforms.

Conclusion

India and Australia have moved well beyond a traditional bilateral relationship towards a broad strategic partnership. The next phase depends on converting shared interests into lasting institutions, stronger economic and security cooperation, deeper public engagement and effective implementation. Durable strategic alignment, rather than temporary convergence, will determine the long-term strength of this partnership.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of recent developments in the India–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in transforming strategic convergence into a durable strategic alignment.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Should India Restart Dialogue with Pakistan?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

Introduction

India and Pakistan have not held government-level dialogue since **2016**, when talks collapsed after the **Pathankot** and **Uri** terror attacks. Relations further deteriorated after **Pulwama (2019)** and **Pahalgam (2025)**. Recent appeals by eminent citizens, comments from the **RSS**, and growing debate among strategic experts have revived the question of whether India should restart dialogue. The discussion reflects two clear positions—one supports engagement despite tensions, while the other insists that terrorism and present conditions in Pakistan must shape any future talks.

Evolution of India–Pakistan Dialogue

1. **Breakdown of Official Talks:** India and Pakistan have not engaged in official dialogue since **2016**. Repeated terror attacks and growing mistrust have kept diplomatic engagement suspended.
2. **Renewed Debate on Engagement:** A joint appeal by eminent citizens led by **O.P. Shah** and later comments by **RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale** reopened the debate on restarting dialogue. These remarks received support from several former officials while also triggering political criticism.
3. **Dialogue Remains Suspended:** Official talks have remained suspended since 2016 because repeated terror attacks deepened mistrust.

4. **Dialogue Beyond Governments:** Even when governments do not engage, communication between people supporting peace should continue. Such contact helps preserve trust during periods of political tension.
5. **Engagement Is With the State:** Governments and leaders change over time, but relations remain between two countries. Therefore, dialogue should not depend only on the individual currently holding power.

Arguments in Favour of Restarting Dialogue

1. **Nuclear Powers Need Communication:** India and Pakistan are **nuclear-armed neighbours**. Regular dialogue is important because misunderstanding during periods of hostility can increase risks.
2. **Long Suspension Has Not Solved Problems:** Supporters argue that twelve years without dialogue have not reduced tensions, making engagement necessary.
3. **Military Leadership Has Delivered Agreements Earlier:** Successful negotiations have previously taken place with Pakistani military rulers. **Ayub Khan** helped conclude the **Indus Waters Treaty**, **Zia-ul-Haq** eased the **Siachen** deadlock, and **Pervez Musharraf** advanced a four-point understanding on **Kashmir**.
4. **Military Rule Alone Should Not Prevent Talks:** Supporters argue that India regularly engages governments of different political systems across the world. Therefore, Pakistan's military influence alone should not become a permanent reason to avoid dialogue.
5. **Dialogue Does Not Mean Weakness:** Negotiating does not require compromising national security. A country can conduct military operations when required and still maintain diplomatic communication.
6. **Political Signals Are Emerging:** RSS General Secretary **Dattatreya Hosabale** called for keeping the door open for dialogue, and **General Manoj Naravane** also supported engagement. Some analysts believe such voices may create political space for any future government initiative.

Concerns Against Immediate Dialogue

1. **Current Leadership Creates Doubts:** The main concern is the dominant role of **Field Marshal Asim Munir**. Critics question whether the present military leadership has enough incentive to pursue lasting peace.
2. **Terrorism Remains the Biggest Obstacle:** Every major attempt at dialogue has often been followed by a terror attack. This makes it difficult for any elected government to justify restarting talks.
3. **Political Cost of Peace Initiatives:** Leaders such as **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** and **Narendra Modi** attempted diplomatic outreach towards Pakistan. However, every such effort carried significant domestic political risks.
4. **Pakistan's Internal Instability:** Frequent disturbances inside Pakistan create uncertainty about whether any commitments made during dialogue can be implemented effectively.

5. **Trust Deficit Remains High:** The **Indus Waters Treaty** remains suspended after the **Pahalgam attack**, and recent exchanges between the two militaries show that serious differences continue.
6. **Visible Action Is Needed:** Some believe dialogue should begin only after Pakistan shows clear action against terrorist camps. Without such confidence-building measures, negotiations may fail again.

Can Dialogue and Counter-Terrorism Go Together?

1. **Different Views on Preconditions:** One side believes dialogue should begin immediately because waiting has achieved nothing. The other argues that action against terrorism must come before any formal engagement.
2. **Security Cannot Be Ignored:** Any future dialogue must directly address cross-border terrorism. Ignoring this issue would weaken public confidence in the peace process.
3. **Some Military Responses Show Restraint:** During the accidental **BrahMos missile** incident, the Pakistan Army reacted calmly despite civilian criticism. This is cited as an example that military leadership can sometimes act responsibly.
4. **Negotiations Will Remain Difficult:** India is likely to demand an end to cross-border terrorism, while Pakistan may raise issues such as **Balochistan** and **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**. These competing positions will continue to complicate negotiations.
5. **Backchannel Contacts Continue:** **Track 1.5** and **Track 2** meetings in **Muscat, Doha, Thailand and London** have quietly continued after the **2025** conflict. These discussions serve as confidence-building mechanisms rather than substitutes for official diplomacy.

The Way Forward

1. **Begin With Functional Cooperation:** Initial engagement can focus on issues that directly affect ordinary people instead of politically sensitive disputes. This can help rebuild trust gradually.
2. **Expand Cooperation on Climate Issues:** Both countries face serious climate vulnerabilities. Climate-related discussions can provide practical cooperation without involving territorial disagreements.
3. **Work Together on Air Pollution:** Seasonal crop residue burning affects both sides of the border. Joint efforts on air pollution can deliver direct public benefits.
4. **Maintain Security Alongside Diplomacy:** Dialogue should not replace India's security policy. Diplomatic engagement and strong counter-terrorism measures should continue together.
5. **Use Informal Channels:** **Track 1.5, Track 2**, retired officials and civil society interactions can help reduce misunderstandings and prepare the ground for formal negotiations.
6. **Changing Regional Environment:** Some analysts believe regional diplomacy has changed after **2025**. Pakistan's growing engagement with the **United States** and changing regional equations have strengthened the case for diplomatic engagement.

7. **Political Space Will Be Essential:** Strategic discussions are increasing, but official dialogue still requires clear political will. Quiet signalling alone cannot replace government-level decisions.

Conclusion

India's Pakistan policy faces a difficult balance between **national security** and **diplomatic engagement**. Supporters believe continuous dialogue can reduce tensions between **two nuclear neighbours**, while critics insist that **credible action against terrorism** must come first. A cautious approach combining **security preparedness, confidence-building measures, informal engagement, and functional cooperation** offers the most practical path towards any future dialogue.

Question for practice:

Examine the key arguments for and against restarting dialogue between India and Pakistan, and suggest the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Revisiting Early Warning Systems Amid Western Ghats Landslides

Source: The post "Revisiting Early Warning Systems Amid Western Ghats Landslides" has been created based on "Revisiting Early Warning Systems Amid Western Ghats Landslides" published in "Indian Express" on 11th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 3 - Disaster Management

Context: Landslides are one of the most frequent natural disasters in India's mountainous regions, particularly in the **Western Ghats** and the **Himalayas**. Around **13% of India's land area (0.42 million sq km)** is prone to landslides, according to the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**. The recent landslides in **Wayanad** and other parts of the Western Ghats have highlighted the urgent need for robust **Early Warning Systems (EWS)** to minimise loss of life and property.

Need for Landslide Early Warning Systems

1. Early Warning Systems can predict landslides in highly vulnerable locations and provide sufficient time for evacuation.
2. Timely evacuation can significantly reduce casualties, as demonstrated by successful experiences in **Switzerland (2023 and 2025)**.
3. The evacuation before the **2024 Munnar landslides** in Kerala prevented loss of life because warnings were issued by researchers from **Amrita University**.
4. Early warning systems strengthen disaster preparedness and improve the response capacity of district administrations.

Existing Initiatives in India

1. Sensor-based Early Warning System (Amrita University Model)

- a. Researchers have installed instruments such as **tilt meters, pressure gauges and accelerometers** at vulnerable slopes.
- b. These sensors continuously monitor ground movement, vibrations and slope stability.

- c. A warning is issued when sensor readings cross predefined safety thresholds.
- d. This method is scientifically robust and provides sufficient lead time for evacuation.

2. Probabilistic Forecasting Model (IIT Mandi Model)

- a. The IIT Mandi team has developed a satellite-based landslide forecasting model.
- b. The model identifies vulnerable locations using a database of previous landslides.
- c. It combines highly localised rainfall forecasts with soil conditions, rock stability, slope characteristics and population density.
- d. Around **7-10 rainfall-derived parameters** are analysed for every location.
- e. The model has been validated against nearly **80 actual landslides** in the Himalayan region.

Challenges

- 1. Sensor-based systems provide information only for the specific slope where instruments are installed and cannot monitor neighbouring slopes.
- 2. Landslides are highly localised events, making prediction difficult across large regions.
- 3. High-resolution local rainfall forecasts are currently available only on the same day or one day in advance, limiting the warning period.
- 4. India has not yet comprehensively identified all high-risk landslide-prone zones for targeted deployment of sensors.
- 5. Resource constraints and inadequate institutional coordination slow down large-scale implementation.

Way Forward

- 1. India should comprehensively identify high-risk landslide-prone areas where frequent landslides threaten lives and property.
- 2. Sensor networks should be installed at the most vulnerable locations across the Western Ghats and the Himalayan region.
- 3. The India Meteorological Department should strengthen high-resolution local rainfall forecasting to provide longer lead times.
- 4. Satellite-based forecasting should be integrated with ground-based sensor networks for more accurate predictions.
- 5. Strong coordination among research institutions, IMD, NDMA, State Disaster Management Authorities and district administrations should be ensured.
- 6. Adequate financial resources and sustained policy support should be provided to establish a nationwide landslide Early Warning System within the next few years.

Conclusion: Landslides cannot be completely prevented, but their devastating impacts can be significantly reduced through scientific prediction, timely warnings and efficient evacuation. A combination of **sensor-based monitoring, satellite-based probabilistic forecasting** and **improved weather prediction** can build a reliable and comprehensive landslide Early Warning System, making India's disaster management framework more resilient.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Question: Landslides in the Western Ghats and Himalayan region highlight the urgent need for effective Early Warning Systems (EWS). Discuss the significance, existing initiatives, challenges, and the way forward for landslide early warning systems in India.

A future of financial health for every Indian

Source: The post "A future of financial health for every Indian" has been created based on "A future of financial health for every Indian" published in "The Hindu" on 6th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy

Context: Financial health refers to ensuring that individuals have access to the right financial policies, products and services to manage daily expenses, remain resilient during financial shocks, save and invest for future goals, and achieve long-term financial security. As India moves towards Viksit Bharat 2047, the focus should shift from merely opening bank accounts to improving the overall financial well-being of every citizen.

About Financial Health

1. Financial health enables people to manage day-to-day expenses effectively.
2. It helps individuals remain financially resilient during unexpected shocks such as disasters or medical emergencies.
3. It encourages saving and investing for both short-term and long-term goals.
4. It provides confidence and financial security for the future.
5. Financial health goes beyond owning a bank account by ensuring access to insurance, pensions, responsible credit and investments.

Importance of Financial Health Important for India

1. India has witnessed remarkable progress in financial inclusion, with adult account ownership increasing from 56% to 89% within ten years (World Bank Global Findex).
2. Financially healthy households contribute to resilient economic growth and national prosperity.
3. It supports the vision of transforming "welfare to wealth creation" under Viksit Bharat 2047.
4. It strengthens trust in financial institutions and improves household financial stability.

Examples Highlighted in India

1. Informal workers have started saving for retirement through the National Pension System (NPS).
2. Informal workers in Delhi are benefiting from retirement accounts supported by Universal Pensions.
3. Nurses in Mumbai have improved financial stability through workplace financial products such as responsible credit, financial health scores and insurance.
4. Regulators and banks are using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve financial decision-making, increase savings, expand insurance coverage and tackle fraud.

Steps to Strengthen Financial Health

1. Develop Jan Dhan 2.0

- a. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) should evolve from a basic bank account scheme into a comprehensive household financial resilience platform.
- b. PMJDY should be integrated with Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs), PM-KISAN, MGNREGA wage payments, e-Shram, Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY).
- c. Linking multiple schemes through a single account will strengthen household financial security.
- d. Women, who hold the majority of PMJDY accounts, along with migrants, informal workers and gig workers, will benefit significantly.

2. Leverage Digital Public Infrastructure

- a. India should utilise its strong Digital Public Infrastructure to improve financial health.
- b. Platforms such as MahaVISTA, Account Aggregator, Unified Lending Interface (ULI), DigiLocker and AI-based applications should be expanded.
- c. These technologies can strengthen financial capability, improve access to credit and increase consumer choice.

3. Use Data for Better Policymaking

- a. Household surveys, administrative databases and digital platforms should be used to generate financial health data.
- b. This information can improve policymaking, strengthen consumer protection and enhance accountability in the financial sector.

4. Strengthen Public-Private Collaboration

- a. Government, regulators, financial institutions, employers and fintech companies should work together.
- b. Public-private partnerships can expand financial services, promote innovation and improve financial well-being.
- c. Countries such as the Netherlands and Indonesia demonstrate the benefits of such collaboration.

Conclusion: India's next leap should focus on ensuring financial health for every citizen, rather than merely financial inclusion. By strengthening Jan Dhan 2.0, digital public infrastructure, data-driven policymaking and public-private partnerships, India can build financially resilient households and achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Question: Financial health is emerging as the next stage of financial inclusion in India. Discuss the concept of financial health and suggest measures to strengthen it for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Fix the House: On Social Media, Social Media Access

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Governance

Introduction

During his visit to Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Australia's decision to ban social media access for children below 16 years and said India was learning from the move. His remarks have strengthened the debate on introducing age-based restrictions in India. As concerns over children's online safety and mental health grow, policymakers face a larger challenge of balancing children's rights with safer and more responsible digital platforms.

Social Media and Children: Opportunities and Risks

1. **Role in children's lives:** Social media supports learning, communication, play, self-expression, friendships, and identity development. These opportunities are also important for the realisation of children's rights..
2. **Support and access to information:** Digital platforms provide **peer support, mental health information, and access to LGBTQIA+ communities**. These opportunities are important for many children who may not find similar support offline.
3. **Risks to children's well-being:** Social media can affect **sleep, expose children to cyberbullying, addictive recommendation systems, self-harm content, and eating disorder-related material**. These risks have increased concerns about children's online safety.
4. **Growing global concern:** Many countries believe that social media companies have not effectively protected children. This has led governments to consider stronger regulations instead of depending only on voluntary action by platforms.
5. **Policy debate:** Supporters view age restrictions as a way to reduce children's exposure to online harms. Critics argue that safer platform design and stronger company responsibility are more effective than access bans alone.
6. **Need for a balanced approach:** Social media offers both **important opportunities and serious risks**. The challenge is to maximise its benefits while reducing harm through effective regulation.

What Does the Evidence Say?

1. **Association is clear, causation is uncertain:** Research shows a clear association between **social media use and mental health problems**, especially among girls. However, experts still debate **how much of this relationship is directly caused by social media**.
2. **Limits of existing research:** Most studies are **observational**, making it difficult to establish cause and effect. Teenagers already facing depression may spend more time online, making the relationship more complex.
3. **Quality of use matters more than time:** Experts argue that **how children use social media** is often more important than the number of hours spent online. Active participation and supportive communities create different experiences from passive browsing or hostile online spaces.
4. **Australia's experience:** Australia became the **first country to ban social media access for children below 16 years**, making it a **real-world policy experiment**. However, there is **no clear evidence**

yet that the ban improves children's mental health, and research estimates that around 85% of children aged 12–16 still continue to use social media, highlighting enforcement challenges.

5. **Different expert opinions:** Some psychologists believe governments should act quickly instead of waiting for perfect evidence, similar to lessons from tobacco control. Others believe policies should rely on stronger evidence before introducing nationwide bans.

India's Emerging Regulatory Framework

1. **Growing policy focus:** The Central Government is actively examining **age-based safeguards** for children. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** praised Australia's reforms and said India was learning from that experience.
2. **Consultations with stakeholders:** The government has held discussions with **social media companies and other stakeholders** to develop safeguards for minors. Online safety has become an important policy priority.
3. **Preference for graded regulation:** Instead of a complete ban, the Centre is considering **age-based restrictions**. A separate law regulating children's access to social media may also be introduced.
4. **State-level proposals:** Karnataka has proposed banning social media for children below **16 years**, while **Andhra Pradesh** plans restrictions for those below **13 years**. **Goa** is also examining similar measures.
5. **Three age categories under consideration:** The proposed framework includes **8–12 years** with the strictest controls, **12–16 years** with monitored access, and **16–18 years** with comparatively flexible safeguards.
6. **Possible regulatory measures:** The proposals include **time-based restrictions, daily usage limits, mandatory parental consent for account creation, and age-verification systems** on digital platforms.
7. **Constitutional jurisdiction:** **Entry 31 of the Union List (List I) of the Seventh Schedule** gives **Parliament exclusive power** to regulate **telecommunications and the internet**. Therefore, state-level social media bans may face jurisdictional challenges.
8. **Legal framework:** India's digital ecosystem is mainly governed through the **Information Technology Act, 2000** and the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, which regulate digital intermediaries and online platforms.
9. **Economic Survey recommendation:** The **Economic Survey 2025–26** recommended **age-based limits on children's social media use and digital advertisements**. It also suggested promoting **basic phones or education-only tablets with usage limits and content filters** to reduce children's exposure to harmful material.

Global Approaches

1. **Australia's model:** Australia became the **first country** to enforce a nationwide **minimum age of 16 years** for social media accounts. Platforms are required to deactivate accounts held by underage users.
2. **Indonesia's proposal:** Indonesia has announced plans to **ban high-risk social media platforms** for children below **16 years** as part of efforts to improve online safety.
3. **France's proposal:** France has proposed **restricting social media access for children below 15 years**, reflecting growing concern over children's digital well-being.
4. **China's approach:** China has adopted **strict time limits on children's online gaming**, showing that some countries prefer regulating digital use instead of relying only on platform bans.
5. **Global regulatory trend:** Different countries are adopting different models, but all reflect a **growing shift towards stronger government intervention** to protect children in the digital space.

Challenges in Age-Based Restrictions

1. **Limited evidence of effectiveness:** Although social media use is linked with harm, there is **no clear evidence that age-based bans alone improve children's mental health**. The relationship between social media use and harm remains complex.
2. **Children's rights may be affected:** Strict restrictions may **limit children's access to educational resources, health information, supportive communities, and opportunities for self-expression**, affecting the enjoyment of their rights.
3. **Risk of unsafe alternatives:** Children may shift towards **less-regulated online spaces** and become less willing to seek help if they face online harm.
4. **Reduced platform accountability:** Focusing only on age restrictions may **reduce pressure on technology companies** to improve platform design, provide age-appropriate services, and strengthen content moderation.
5. **Privacy and implementation concerns:** **Age-verification systems** may create privacy and data protection concerns. Enforcement may also shift greater responsibility to parents and caregivers.
6. **Different needs of children:** A single age limit cannot reflect the **different developmental stages, abilities, and circumstances** of all children. There is no consensus on the most appropriate minimum age for social media access.
7. **Enforcement challenges in India:** Any nationwide restriction would be difficult to implement because India has **over 1.1 billion smartphone connections** and one of the **world's largest populations of young internet users**.

The Way Forward

1. **Child-centred policymaking:** Policymakers should conduct **child rights impact assessments** before introducing age-based restrictions. **Children and adolescents** should also be involved so that policies reflect their needs and experiences.

2. **Clear and evidence-based regulation:** The objective of regulation should be clearly defined, whether it is to reduce **cyberbullying, sexual victimisation, harmful content, or mental health risks**. Age limits should be based on **research on child development and online risks**.
3. **Platform accountability over access control:** Rather than mainly deciding who may enter social media, governments should focus on how platforms operate. Companies should improve content moderation, safer platform design, privacy protection, chronological feeds for minors, and effective parental controls..
4. **Promote digital literacy and family support:** Children should receive **digital literacy, critical thinking, and online safety education** from an early age. Parents and educators should also receive the guidance needed to support safe digital use.
5. **Adopt a comprehensive approach:** Age-based restrictions alone cannot eliminate online harm. Children's safety requires coordinated action by **families, schools, communities, governments, and technology companies**, while protecting opportunities for learning, communication, and positive digital participation.
6. **Monitor implementation and outcomes:** Governments should develop **evaluation frameworks** to measure whether regulations reduce harm and improve children's online safety. Stakeholders should also work together to develop **privacy-respecting and technically feasible age-verification systems**.

Conclusion

Protecting children online requires a balanced and evidence-based approach. While age-based restrictions may help reduce some risks, they cannot address every challenge associated with social media. Lasting improvements depend on safer platform design, stronger accountability of technology companies, digital literacy, parental support, and regulations that protect both children's well-being and their rights in the digital environment.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the effectiveness of age-based restrictions on children's social media access in ensuring online safety, and suggest a balanced regulatory approach.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Integrating AI with Digital Public Infrastructure for Enhanced Governance

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- e-Governance

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** together are creating new opportunities for governance and development in India. Platforms such as **Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, GST, and FASTag** have already transformed public service delivery through population-scale digital systems. Integrating AI with this strong digital foundation can improve state capacity, citizen services, and economic productivity. Responsible

governance, trusted institutions, and effective safeguards will be essential to ensure inclusive, secure, and sustainable AI-led growth.

India's Strong Digital Public Infrastructure

1. **Transformation from Data-Poor to Data-Rich Economy:** India has rapidly become a data-rich economy through Jio, UPI, and GST. Population-scale digital data now supports financial inclusion, welfare delivery, enterprise formalisation, and digital governance.
2. **Aadhaar Strengthening Welfare Delivery:** More than 27 billion Aadhaar authentications annually have enabled a 16-fold increase in Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) beneficiaries. Aadhaar has reduced fraud, improved targeting, and increased government spending efficiency by 117 times since 1991.
3. **UPI Creating Large Behavioural Datasets:** UPI processes around 23 billion monthly transactions, making India a global leader in digital payments with 42% of the world's digital transactions. This provides valuable behavioural data for better public policy and financial services.
4. **GST and FASTag Improving Economic Visibility:** GST's nearly 20 crore payments provide real-time information on production, invoicing, supply chains, and consumption. FASTag's 4.5 billion payment transactions generate large mobility and logistics datasets.
5. **Foundation for Population-Scale Governance:** India has become the first developing country to use digital public infrastructure at population scale for development instead of depending only on delayed surveys and traditional statistical systems.
6. **Need for Better Data Ecosystem:** The digital foundation is strong, but **academic research, open public data commons, and stronger think tanks** are still developing and require further expansion.

Need for Integrating AI with DPI

1. **Improving State Capacity:** AI can help governments allocate resources better, improve service delivery, detect fraud earlier, and respond more quickly to public needs.
2. **Breaking Digital Silos:** Many government systems still work separately with limited interoperability. AI can integrate structured and unstructured data and improve coordination across departments.
3. **Moving from PDFs to APIs:** Government technology systems need to shift from document-based processes towards API (Application Programming Interface)-driven digital services, enabling faster, seamless, and interoperable public service delivery.
4. **Supporting Jan Vishwas through Better Governance:** AI can strengthen governance while respecting India's consent architecture and the principles of Jan Vishwas, making government services more accessible and citizen-friendly.
5. **Expanding Multilingual Public Services:** AI-powered multilingual interfaces can improve access to education, labour markets, and government services for people speaking different Indian languages.

6. **Supporting Viksit Bharat 2047:** Integrating AI with DPI supports the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 by improving productivity, strengthening public services, promoting inclusion, and building strategic technological capability.
7. **Global Leadership Opportunity:** Unlike the US model based on private-sector data or the China model based on platform ecosystems, India can combine AI with DPI to create a unique model of enhanced state capacity.

Potential Benefits of AI-Enabled DPI

1. **Better Governance and Citizen Services:** AI can improve welfare targeting, reduce fraud, strengthen public health spending, and provide faster government services through intelligent decision-making.
2. **Employment Through AI Deployment:** Deploying AI across government, businesses, and public services may create more employment opportunities than developing frontier AI models alone.
3. **Boosting Enterprise Formalisation:** India's **Enterprise DPI**, including **Universal Enterprise Number, Entity DigiLocker, API Setu, and Single Source of Truth for Regulation**, can simplify business operations and formalisation.
4. **Universal Lifetime Social Security Account:** A proposed Universal Lifetime Social Security Account (Aadhaar Punji) can improve formalisation and provide long-term social security for every citizen.
5. **Improving Economic Efficiency:** AI-enabled DPI can reduce information asymmetry, lower transaction costs, improve credit allocation, strengthen worker-job matching, and enhance supply chain efficiency.
6. **Supporting Innovation and Inclusive Growth:** India's deployment-first approach encourages AI for All, ensuring AI benefits agriculture, healthcare, education, manufacturing, governance, climate action, and other sectors.
7. **Strengthening AI Infrastructure:** Under the IndiaAI Mission, over 38,000 GPUs, 9,500+ datasets, 273 sectoral AI models, and 40+ petaflop supercomputing systems have strengthened India's AI ecosystem.
8. **Building Skilled Human Resources:** IndiaAI and FutureSkills initiatives support **500 PhDs, 5,000 postgraduates, 8,000 undergraduates, 570 AI Data Labs, 27 IndiaAI Labs**, while nearly **90% of startups** are adopting AI.

Challenges

1. **Weak Government Technology Capacity:** Government departments still face limitations in technical capability, making AI adoption and digital integration more difficult.
2. **Limited Interoperability Across Systems:** Digital silos reduce coordination between government departments and prevent seamless service delivery.

3. **Evolving AI Governance Framework:** Existing laws address many AI-related issues, but rapidly evolving AI requires stronger governance, updated regulations, and clearer legal responsibilities.
4. **Managing AI Risks:** AI systems can create misinformation, cyberattacks, bias, discrimination, transparency failures, national security risks, and threats to critical infrastructure.
5. **Protecting Vulnerable Groups:** Children face risks from harmful recommendation systems, while women are increasingly targeted through AI-generated deepfakes.
6. **Ensuring Accountability:** Clear responsibility is required across AI developers, deployers, and users. Better transparency, grievance redressal, and predictable enforcement remain necessary.
7. **Fragmented Institutional Framework:** AI governance responsibilities are distributed across multiple agencies, making coordination and consistent implementation more difficult.

Way Forward

1. **Expand AI Infrastructure:** Continue investments in compute capacity, datasets, foundational models, Digital Public Infrastructure, data sharing, and institutional capabilities under the IndiaAI Mission.
2. **Build AI Capacity Across Society:** Expand AI education, strengthen public sector technical skills, and increase AI awareness among citizens and small businesses.
3. **Adopt Balanced AI Regulation:** Review existing laws, address regulatory gaps, and create future-ready legal frameworks without slowing innovation.
4. **Strengthen Risk Assessment Systems:** Develop India-specific AI risk assessment frameworks, incident reporting systems, and evidence-based safeguards for responsible AI deployment.
5. **Create Strong Governance Institutions:** Operationalise institutions such as the AI Governance Group, Technology & Policy Expert Committee, and AI Safety Institute to ensure coordinated implementation.
6. **Adopt a Whole-of-Government Approach:** Strengthen coordination among ministries, sectoral regulators, standards bodies, and public institutions to ensure consistent AI governance and effective implementation across sectors.
7. **Implement the Action Plan in Phases:** Focus on institutional strengthening, common standards, regulatory sandboxes, DPI integration, updated laws, and long-term accountability to build a trusted AI ecosystem.

Conclusion

India's strong Digital Public Infrastructure provides a strong foundation for integrating Artificial Intelligence into governance. AI can improve public services, strengthen state capacity, support innovation, create quality jobs, and promote inclusive economic growth. These benefits require trusted institutions, balanced regulation,

responsible AI deployment, effective coordination, and continuous capacity building. Together, they can help realise the vision of AI for All and Viksit Bharat 2047.

Question for practice:

Examine the need for integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) to enhance governance in India. Discuss its potential benefits, key challenges, and the way forward.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Insular incentive: On ethanol-blended fuel and the Indian consumer

Source: The post “Insular incentive: On ethanol-blended fuel and the Indian consumer” has been created based on “Insular incentive: On ethanol-blended fuel and the Indian consumer” published in “The Hindu” on 13th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 3- Economy

Context: India's ethanol blending policy aims to reduce crude oil imports, improve environmental sustainability, and enhance farmers' incomes. However, the policy must ensure that these benefits outweigh the economic costs imposed on consumers and the inefficient use of natural resources.

Benefits of the Ethanol Blending Policy

1. The ethanol blending programme helps reduce India's dependence on imported crude oil.
2. The policy contributes to environmental improvement by promoting cleaner fuel.
3. The programme provides an additional source of income for farmers by creating demand for ethanol feedstocks.
4. The policy strengthens India's energy security by diversifying fuel sources.

Concerns with the Present Policy

1. The government continues to procure E20 ethanol at a higher cost even when crude oil prices remain below \$70 per barrel.
2. Consumers are forced to pay more for E20 fuel despite its lower mileage compared to pure petrol.
3. Oil marketing companies procure ethanol at administered prices, while distilleries purchase feedstock at market prices, exposing them to higher financial risks.
4. Higher feedstock prices do not necessarily benefit farmers because intermediaries capture a large share of the gains.
5. The policy rewards every litre of ethanol irrespective of the feedstock used, thereby favouring sugarcane because it has the largest installed production base.
6. Sugarcane is one of the most water-intensive and fertilizer-intensive crops and is mainly cultivated in water-stressed states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.
7. The present policy does not adequately promote resource efficiency or protect food security.

Alternative Feedstocks for Ethanol Production

1. The government has encouraged ethanol production from maize and other grains by expanding distillation capacity.

2. The government has also permitted ethanol production from surplus or damaged rice procured by the Food Corporation of India.
3. Maize and millets require less water than sugarcane, although maize still requires significant fertilizer inputs.
4. Sweet sorghum is less water-intensive and has a shorter growing season than sugarcane.
5. Lignocellulosic biomass such as rice straw, wheat straw, maize stover, and groundnut shells can be used to produce second-generation (2G) ethanol.
6. Second-generation ethanol reduces competition with food crops and also helps address the problem of stubble burning.

Way Forward

1. The government should incentivize ethanol production from feedstocks that are more resource-efficient.
2. The government should improve irrigation facilities and strengthen logistics infrastructure for ethanol production.
3. The government should establish revenue-sharing arrangements between ethanol producers and cooperatives.
4. The government should provide premium prices for ethanol produced from agricultural residues.
5. The government should subsidize equipment and infrastructure for collecting and storing crop residues.
6. The government should facilitate long-term contracts and assured offtake agreements between aggregators and distilleries.
7. The ethanol blending policy should remain aligned with agricultural policy and should not function independently.
8. The government should avoid forcing consumers to purchase costlier fuel with lower mileage.

Conclusion: India's ethanol blending policy should balance energy security, environmental sustainability, farmer welfare, and consumer interests. A resource-efficient and economically viable ethanol policy will ensure long-term benefits without imposing unnecessary costs on consumers or compromising food and water security.

Question: India's ethanol blending policy should promote resource efficiency rather than irrationally forcing consumers to bear higher costs. Discuss.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Demographic Shifts and Governance Challenges

Source: The post “Demographic Shifts and Governance Challenges” has been created based on “Demographic Shifts and Governance Challenges” published in “Indian Express” on 13th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 1– Social Issues

Context: Population debates have shifted from concerns of **population explosion** to fears of **population decline**. However, evidence suggests that exaggerated demographic fears often distort policymaking, create

social divisions, and disproportionately affect women. The real challenge is to manage demographic transition through balanced and evidence-based policies.

Population-related fears and their social consequences

1. Discussions on population often shift from demographic concerns to **controlling women's reproductive choices**.
2. Fear-based narratives encourage calls for a return to traditional family norms, restrictions on contraception, and opposition to abortion.
3. Such rhetoric can weaken social cohesion and distract attention from structural demographic challenges.

Why fears of population decline are overstated

1. India is not facing immediate depopulation

- a. According to **UN medium projections**, India's population is expected to peak at about **1.7 billion** before gradually declining to around the current level by the end of the century.
- b. Lower projections by the **Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME)** may overestimate fertility decline by assuming that increasing education will continue to reduce fertility.
- c. Recent evidence shows that fertility among highly educated women has stabilised, while fertility has mainly declined among less-educated women.

2. Ageing will not necessarily create a labour shortage

- a. The proportion of people aged **60 years and above** will increase significantly. However, the **working-age population** will decline only marginally.
- b. Rising productivity through **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and greater participation of women in the formal workforce can compensate for labour shortages.

3. Regional demographic imbalance requires institutional solutions

- a. Southern states experienced fertility decline earlier than northern states.
- b. Population-based delimitation could reduce the political representation of southern states.
- c. At the same time, lower fertility has contributed to greater investment in human capital and higher economic productivity in states such as Tamil Nadu.
- d. Therefore, future policymaking must balance **demographic representation** with **economic contribution**.

4. Religious demographic fears lack empirical support

- a. Although Muslim fertility remains marginally higher than Hindu fertility, both communities have experienced similar declines in fertility.
- b. Even if the current fertility gap remains unchanged, projections indicate only a modest increase in the Muslim population share over several decades.
- c. Hence, fears of dramatic demographic shifts are not supported by available evidence.

Way Forward

1. Adopt **evidence-based population policies** instead of fear-driven narratives.
2. Protect **women's reproductive autonomy** and ensure continued access to contraception and reproductive healthcare.
3. Increase **female labour force participation** to address future workforce requirements.
4. Reduce the financial burden of raising children by improving the quality and affordability of education.
5. Design institutional mechanisms that balance **demographic realities, economic performance, and federal representation**.

Conclusion: Population change is a natural part of demographic transition. Rather than responding through alarmist narratives, India should focus on managing ageing, enhancing productivity, empowering women, and investing in human capital. A balanced, evidence-based approach will strengthen both social cohesion and long-term economic development.

Question: Population change presents both opportunities and challenges. Discuss why demographic change should be managed through evidence-based policies rather than population-related fears.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Five Crore Indians Wait When the Courts Take a Break

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Judiciary

Introduction

India's justice system is under growing pressure due to **rising judicial pendency, shortage of judges, and delays in dispute resolution**. The debate over court vacations has renewed concerns about timely justice, but it also raises a larger question of whether judicial vacations or deeper structural weaknesses are responsible for the backlog. The real challenge is to ensure continuous court functioning while protecting judges' well-being and improving the overall efficiency of the justice delivery system.

Scale and Impact of Judicial Pendency

1. **Growing case backlog:** As of **December 31, 2025**, more than **5.39 crore cases** were pending in Indian courts. This included **over 4.76 crore cases** in district courts, **63.6 lakh** in High Courts, and **more than 92,000** in the Supreme Court.
2. **Long wait for justice:** A government study estimated that, at the present rate of disposal, clearing the pending cases could take **around three centuries**. This shows the urgent need for faster case disposal.
3. **Undertrial prisoners suffer the most:** Around **three-fourths of India's prison population** consists of undertrials. Many remain in jail for years despite not being convicted and sometimes spend longer in prison than the punishment they may finally receive.
4. **Burden on ordinary litigants:** Delayed hearings increase legal costs, uncertainty, and hardship for citizens. Poor and vulnerable people are affected the most because justice remains inaccessible for long periods.

5. **Public confidence is affected:** When disputes remain unresolved for years, faith in the justice delivery system weakens and the purpose of timely justice is undermined.

Debate over Judicial Vacations

1. **Limited functioning during vacations:** During the Supreme Court's **summer break from June 1 to July 12**, only a few vacation Benches hear urgent matters. Regular hearings reduce during this period.
2. **Purpose of judicial vacations:** Vacations allow judges to write reserved judgments, study case records, conduct legal research, and complete administrative work that cannot be finished during regular sittings.
3. **Need for institutional continuity:** The concern is not that judges receive leave, but that most judges take leave together. A better roster can allow judges to rest while courts continue functioning at full strength.
4. **Continuous public service:** Like hospitals and other essential public institutions, courts should continue functioning throughout the year through proper rotation of judicial leave.
5. **Colonial legacy of court vacations:** The present vacation calendar originated during the British period when English judges left India during the summer. The system has largely continued even though circumstances have changed.
6. **Renaming without operational change:** In 2024, the Supreme Court renamed summer vacations as "**partial court working days**." However, the number of actual sitting days remained almost the same.

Structural Challenges in the Justice Delivery System

1. **Low judge-to-population ratio:** India has **around 20 judges per million people**, while the **Law Commission recommended 50 judges per million in 1987**. This leaves every judge responsible for a very large number of cases.
2. **Judicial vacancies reduce court capacity:** Nearly **one-third of High Court posts** remain vacant because appointments are delayed. This further increases pendency.
3. **High litigation load despite efficient disposal:** According to the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**, judges in India dispose of **around 2,600 cases annually**, compared to **about 81 cases** in the United States. This shows that the problem is the volume of cases rather than lack of judicial effort.
4. **Institutional delays in appointments:** Filling judicial vacancies depends on coordination between the judiciary and the government. Slow appointments weaken the justice delivery system.
5. **Growing disputes with limited judicial capacity:** The number of new cases continues to rise faster than the system's capacity to dispose of them. This widens the backlog every year.
6. **Need to address structural weaknesses:** The debate should move beyond blaming judges or focusing only on vacations. Strengthening judicial capacity is essential for timely justice.

Judicial Reforms for Speedy and Accessible Justice

1. **Stagger judicial vacations:** Judges should continue to receive leave, but vacations can be taken in phases instead of all at once. This will allow courts to function with adequate Benches throughout the year.
2. **Implement committee recommendations:** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee (2023)**, **Law Commission**, and **Justice Malimath Committee** recommended staggered vacations so that courts remain functional while judges receive adequate rest.
3. **Review judicial strength norms:** India has **around 20 judges per million people**, while the **Law Commission recommended 50 judges per million in 1987**. As litigation and population have grown significantly since then, judicial strength should be reassessed and expanded to meet current requirements.
4. **Promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):** Mediation, arbitration, and conciliation should become the preferred method for resolving suitable disputes before they reach the courts.
5. **Strengthen Lok Adalats:** Lok Adalats have already settled **over 2.59 crore cases** in a single national sitting and **23.5 crore cases** in three years. Their wider use can reduce the burden on regular courts.
6. **Implement the Mediation Act effectively:** The **Mediation Act, 2023** should be implemented properly so that more disputes are settled before litigation begins.
7. **Expand Online Dispute Resolution (ODR):** Technology-enabled dispute resolution can improve accessibility, reduce costs, and provide faster justice, especially for smaller disputes.
8. **Use the expertise of retired judges:** Retired judges can monitor high-pendency areas, guide institutional reforms, and help improve case management without handling regular court work.
9. **Encourage early settlement:** Lawyers, litigants, and public institutions should promote negotiated settlements wherever possible. Courts should remain the last option for dispute resolution.
10. **Promote coordinated institutional reforms:** The judiciary, government, legal profession, and ADR institutions should work together to improve the justice delivery system.

Conclusion

India's judicial backlog reflects deeper structural weaknesses rather than the vacation calendar alone. **Judicial continuity, adequate judicial strength, timely appointments, wider use of ADR and ODR, and better institutional coordination** are essential for faster justice. The focus should be on creating a system where judges receive adequate rest while citizens receive **timely, accessible, and effective justice**.

Question for practice:

Examine the debate over judicial vacations in India. Are court vacations the primary reason for judicial pendency, or do deeper structural challenges require greater attention?

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Why has China banned helium exports?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

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Introduction

China has **temporarily banned helium exports with immediate effect**, although it has not clarified the reason, duration, or scope of the restriction. The decision comes when the global helium market is already under pressure from **Russia's export restrictions, geopolitical tensions in West Asia, and changes in the U.S. helium reserve system**. Since helium is essential for several high-technology industries, the move has raised concerns about global supply, prices, and industrial production.

Global Helium Market: Production and Supply Chain

1. **China's limited production and import dependence:** China produces only **around 1.6% of global helium** but imports **more than 80%** of its domestic requirement. This makes the country highly dependent on overseas suppliers despite being an exporter of helium.
2. **Major global producers:** The **United States supplies about 43%** of global helium production, making it the largest producer. It is followed by **Qatar, Russia, Canada, and Algeria**, showing that production is concentrated in only a few countries.
3. **Changes in the U.S. helium system:** In **2024**, the United States privatized its **Federal Helium Reserve** by selling its assets to the **Messer Group**. This reduced the reserve's ability to absorb supply shocks during international crises.
4. **Russia's export restrictions:** Russia has tightened helium exports by requiring the **Prime Minister's approval for shipments until 2027**. These restrictions have added pressure to an already tight global supply.
5. **West Asia supply risks:** The conflict involving **Iran** has created uncertainty over helium supplies from **Qatar**, which meets **about 33% of global demand**, especially in Asia. A large share of global helium production now depends on shipments passing through the **Strait of Hormuz**.
6. **Growing pressure on Asian demand:** Demand for helium remains strong in Asian economies because of expanding **semiconductor, electronics, and fibre-optic industries**. Any disruption in supply directly affects manufacturing and technology sectors.
7. **China's role in global trade:** China imports large quantities of helium for domestic use but also re-exports part of its supplies to markets such as **South Korea, Taiwan, Germany, the United States, Japan, and parts of Europe**. This gives China an important position in the global helium supply chain.

Why Has China Imposed the Export Ban?

1. **No official explanation:** China announced the export ban through the **Ministry of Commerce** and the **General Administration of Customs** but did not specify the reason, duration, destination-wise exemptions, or overall scope of the restriction.
2. **Protecting domestic supply:** The restriction is widely seen as an effort to preserve helium for **China's semiconductor industry and medical sector**. These sectors depend on a steady supply of helium for uninterrupted operations.

3. **Supporting the chip industry:** China is rapidly expanding domestic chip manufacturing to meet growing **artificial intelligence (AI)** demand. Helium is essential for semiconductor production, making uninterrupted supply important for this industrial strategy.
4. **Response to supply shortages:** The export ban came when helium supplies had already tightened because of Russia's export restrictions and disruptions linked to West Asia. Conserving domestic supplies reduces the risk of shortages within China.
5. **Managing falling imports:** China's helium imports declined by **more than 10% year-on-year during the first five months of 2026** because of disruptions linked to the Iran conflict. Lower imports increased the need to conserve available supplies.
6. **Rising exports despite shortages:** Even as imports declined, China's helium exports **rose by 32% year-on-year to 409 tonnes**, supported by rising global prices and increased shipments to **South Korea and Taiwan**. The ban stops further outflow during a period of tight supply.
7. **Part of a wider resource security approach:** China has previously restricted exports of products such as **fuel, fertilisers, and sulphuric acid** to avoid domestic shortages. The helium restriction follows a similar approach of securing critical industrial resources.
8. **Possible geopolitical factor:** The export ban follows a **U.S. congressional investigation into Messer Group's Chinese interests**, creating the possibility of reciprocal trade measures. Although no official link has been confirmed, the timing has raised such concerns.

Helium: Origin and Production Process

1. **A naturally occurring resource:** Helium is the **second-lightest element after hydrogen** and cannot be manufactured. It is a **non-renewable resource** that forms naturally deep inside the Earth over millions of years.
2. **Formation inside the Earth:** Helium is produced when **uranium and thorium** undergo radioactive decay. The emitted **alpha particles** capture electrons and become helium atoms.
3. **Presence with natural gas:** Over long periods, helium moves into underground **natural gas reservoirs**. It is extracted along with natural gas because both remain trapped in the same geological formations.
4. **Commercial extraction process:** Natural gas is processed to recover helium only when helium makes up at least **0.3% of the gas by volume**. The helium is then separated because it has a **different boiling point** from other gases.
5. **Alternative sources are limited:** Some helium is recovered from **LNG plants** and from the **air**, but these sources produce very small quantities. They do not contribute significantly to global helium demand.
6. **High purity requirement:** Helium supplied for commercial use is usually **at least 99.997% pure**. Such high purity is necessary for industries that require stable and contamination-free conditions.

Strategic Importance and Applications of Helium

1. **Unique physical properties:** Helium has an **extremely low boiling point of -269°C** and is chemically inert. These properties make it an ideal coolant for advanced industrial and scientific applications.
2. **Healthcare and medical equipment:** Helium cools the powerful magnets used in **MRI machines**. A stable helium supply is therefore essential for the functioning of modern healthcare systems.
3. **Semiconductor and quantum technologies:** Helium is used to cool **silicon wafers** during semiconductor manufacturing. It is also increasingly required in devices used for **quantum computing**.
4. **Leak detection in industries:** Helium atoms are very small and can pass through tiny gaps that other gases cannot. Engineers use this property to detect leaks in highly sensitive industrial systems.
5. **Optical fibre manufacturing:** Helium rapidly and evenly cools **molten glass** while optical fibres are being drawn. It also prevents oxygen and nitrogen from forming bubbles inside the material.
6. **Space and scientific research:** Space agencies such as **ISRO, NASA, and SpaceX** use helium to pressurise rocket fuel tanks. Research laboratories also depend on helium for many scientific applications.
7. **Balloons and airships:** Helium is widely used as a lifting gas for **balloons and airships**, including those used in tourism and research. Its non-flammable nature makes it safer than hydrogen.
8. **Major demand sectors:** According to the **U.S. Geological Survey**, laboratories account for **22%** of helium demand. They are followed by **controlled atmospheres and semiconductors (17%)**, **lifting gas (17%)**, **MRI scanners (15%)**, **aerospace (9%)**, and **leak detection (5%)**.

Economic Challenges in the Helium Supply Chain

1. **Sharp rise in prices:** In **June 2026**, the spot price of highly pure helium in **Northeast Asia** increased to **\$150–205 per thousand cubic feet**, almost **double** its level in late **2025**. Tight global supplies have pushed prices upward.
2. **Higher costs for buyers:** The U.S.-based industrial gas supplier **Airgas** declared **force majeure** and imposed an additional charge of **\$13.50 per hundred cubic feet** on existing contracts. This increased the cost for industries that depend on helium.
3. **Expensive purification and liquefaction:** Helium processing requires advanced technology and specialised equipment. A **mid- to large-scale purification and liquefaction plant** costs **more than \$100 million**, while a smaller facility can cost **around \$10 million**.
4. **Costly storage infrastructure:** Underground **salt caverns** provide the best storage because they reduce gas leakage, but they are rare and developing one can cost **more than \$200 million**. Helium can also be stored as compressed gas or cryogenic liquid, both of which require costly infrastructure.
5. **Difficult transportation:** Liquid helium must be transported in **vacuum-jacketed stainless steel containers** that can maintain **-269°C** . Only a limited number of companies manufacture these specialised vessels, including several Chinese firms.

6. **Operational challenges:** Helium containers have a limited holding time. If delivery is delayed, the liquid helium starts **boiling off into the atmosphere**, increasing losses and transportation costs.

Global Implications of China's Export Ban

1. **Global supply and industrial impact:** China's export restriction could further tighten the already strained helium market. Countries that depend on Chinese supplies, especially in Asia, may face shortages and higher costs, affecting **semiconductor, healthcare, aerospace, electronics, fibre-optic, and scientific research** industries.
2. **Reduced role of China as a re-exporter:** China has been importing helium and re-exporting part of it to countries such as **South Korea, Taiwan, Germany, the United States, Japan, and Europe**. The export ban interrupts this supply channel.
3. **Growing importance of supply security:** The decision shows that countries are giving greater priority to securing essential industrial resources during periods of global uncertainty. Helium has become an important strategic resource because of its role in advanced technologies.
4. **Uncertain global market:** The combination of export controls, regional conflicts, and concentrated production has made the global helium market more uncertain. Countries may increasingly treat helium as a strategic resource rather than a normal industrial commodity.

Conclusion

China's export restriction shows that **helium has become a strategic industrial resource rather than just an industrial gas**. Its limited global production, concentrated supply chain, and growing use in advanced technologies have increased its geopolitical importance. As global demand continues to rise, stable supply chains, diversified sources, and efficient management of helium resources will become increasingly important for industrial and technological security.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons behind China's ban on helium exports and discuss its implications for the global helium supply chain and strategic industries.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Parliament, not fate, must shape road safety

Source: The post "**Parliament, not fate, must shape road safety**" has been created based on "**Parliament, not fate, must shape road safety**" published in "Indian Express" on 13th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2 - Polity & Governance

Context: Road accidents in India are largely preventable and therefore represent a failure of governance rather than fate. The Supreme Court in **S. Rajasekaran v. Union of India (2014)** held that preventable road accident deaths are linked to **Article 21**, making road safety a constitutional responsibility.

Constitutional and Institutional Challenges

1. Inconsistent road accident data

- a. **Different government agencies** report different figures for road accident deaths, creating uncertainty in policymaking.
- b. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways reported **1.77 lakh** road accident deaths in 2024.
- c. The National Crime Records Bureau's **Accidental Deaths and Suicides Report** recorded **1.75 lakh** deaths.
- d. The **Crime in India Report** of the National Crime Records Bureau recorded **1.81 lakh** deaths.
- e. These differences arise because each agency follows a separate reporting methodology.

2. Weak implementation of road safety measures

- a. The Supreme Court found serious deficiencies in all the **Four Es of Road Safety**.
- b. Highway maintenance receives only **35–40%** of the estimated funding, resulting in poor road infrastructure.
- c. Traffic laws exist but are not enforced consistently across the country.
- d. Public awareness regarding road safety remains inadequate.
- e. Many accident victims die because ambulances are insufficient, trauma centres are lacking, and police stations often delay action due to jurisdictional disputes.

3. Road safety is a constitutional issue

- a. The Supreme Court held that road accidents are preventable because they result from human failures.
- b. Preventable road accident deaths amount to a failure to protect the **Right to Life under Article 21**.
- c. Accepting road accident deaths as inevitable reflects a failure of constitutional governance.

4. Fragmentation of constitutional responsibilities: The Constitution distributes road safety responsibilities across different levels of government. National highways fall under the **Union List**. Roads, police and public health fall under the **State List** and Motor vehicles fall under the **Concurrent List**. This fragmented distribution prevents any single authority from taking complete responsibility for preventing road accidents.

5. Weak institutional accountability: Governments have mainly relied on committees, advisories and proposed boards to improve road safety. These institutions lack sufficient authority to ensure effective coordination and accountability among different agencies.

Reforms Required

1. Establish a Road Safety Coordination Council: Parliament should establish a **Road Safety Coordination Council** on the model of the **GST Council**. The Council should enable the Centre and States to jointly frame standards for road design, vehicle fitness, emergency medical care and road accident reporting.

2. Amend the Seventh Schedule: Parliament should amend the **Seventh Schedule** to provide greater legislative authority over roads and traffic. Such an amendment would reduce constitutional fragmentation and strengthen accountability.

3. Create statutory District Road Safety Committees: Parliament should make **District Road Safety Committees** mandatory through legislation. These committees should be given clearly defined powers to

monitor road safety measures. States that fail to implement road safety measures should face statutory consequences.

Conclusion: Road accident deaths should not be viewed as unavoidable tragedies because they are largely preventable. Strengthening constitutional coordination, institutional accountability and cooperative federalism is essential to protect the **Right to Life under Article 21** and significantly improve road safety in India.

Question: Road accident deaths are a constitutional governance failure rather than an unavoidable tragedy. Discuss the constitutional and institutional challenges in ensuring road safety in India. Suggest suitable reforms.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

With uncertainty looming, challenges and opportunities for India's Act East policy

Source: The post “With uncertainty looming, challenges and opportunities for India's Act East policy” has been created based on “With uncertainty looming, challenges and opportunities for India's Act East policy” published in “Indian Express” on 13th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2 – International Relations

Context: India's **Act East Policy**, launched in **2014**, marked a strategic shift from the earlier **Look East Policy (1991)**. The policy aims to promote **economic cooperation, strengthen cultural ties, and develop strategic partnerships** with countries in the **Indo-Pacific** through both bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Significance of the Act East Policy

1. Shift from Look East to Act East

- a. The Act East Policy transformed India's engagement with East Asia from a primarily economic approach to a comprehensive strategic partnership.
- b. The policy expanded cooperation to include **security, connectivity, culture, and maritime affairs**.

2. Strengthening India's Indo-Pacific role

- a. The policy has enhanced India's engagement with countries across the Indo-Pacific region.
- b. It has positioned India as a **responsible maritime power** committed to a free, **open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific**.

3. Deepening strategic partnerships

- a. The policy has strengthened India's partnerships with ASEAN and other like-minded democracies.
- b. It has contributed to greater cooperation through bilateral and multilateral platforms.

4. Enhancing maritime security

- a. The policy addresses common maritime challenges such as **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, trafficking in drugs, humans and arms, illegal migration, and natural disasters.**
- b. India's initiatives such as **SAGAR, IPOI, and MAHASAGAR** support regional cooperation in maritime security.

5. Correcting historical neglect

- a. The policy reflects India's intention to overcome its historical neglect of the Asia-Pacific region.
- b. It demonstrates India's willingness to shoulder greater regional and global responsibilities.

Challenges to the Act East Policy

1. Political instability in the neighbourhood: Political instability in **Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka** affects India's regional engagement and connectivity initiatives.

2. Policy inconsistencies of extra-regional powers: Inconsistencies in the policies of countries such as the **United States** create strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific.

3. China's increasing assertiveness: China's growing strategic and maritime assertiveness continues to challenge regional stability. Despite changes in the US approach towards the **Indo-Pacific**, the strategic linkage between the Indian and Pacific Oceans remains important.

4. Infrastructure gaps in Northeast India: Inadequate infrastructure in Northeast India limits its potential to serve as India's gateway to East Asia. Weak connectivity affects trade and regional integration.

5. Balancing strategic objectives: India must ensure that the Act East Policy does not appear excessively security-oriented. Maintaining regional stability requires balancing strategic interests with economic and developmental cooperation.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen connectivity: India should improve physical and economic connectivity through better infrastructure in Northeast India.

2. Deepen ASEAN engagement: India should further strengthen its economic, cultural, and strategic partnership with ASEAN through sustained dialogue and cooperation.

3. Promote maritime cooperation: India should expand initiatives such as **SAGAR, IPOI, and MAHASAGAR** to address both traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges.

4. Strengthen multilateral cooperation: India should continue working with like-minded countries while promoting an inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

5. Balance security and development: India should pursue strategic partnerships without undermining regional stability and should continue giving voice to the concerns of **small island nations.**

Conclusion: The **Act East Policy** has emerged as a key pillar of India's foreign policy by combining economic engagement, strategic partnerships, maritime security, and cultural diplomacy. Addressing regional instability, infrastructure deficits, and geopolitical uncertainties while strengthening cooperation with ASEAN and the wider Indo-Pacific will be crucial for its long-term success.

Question: The Act East Policy has evolved from an economic engagement strategy into a comprehensive strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific. Discuss its significance, challenges, and the way forward.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Can Biogas Aid India's Energy Security?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Infrastructure (energy)

Introduction:

India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil and a large share of its LPG, making its energy security vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, especially in West Asia. The recent LPG supply disruptions have renewed interest in biogas and Compressed Biogas (CBG) as clean, indigenous and renewable fuels. While India has launched several initiatives to promote biogas, achieving large-scale adoption requires stronger implementation, better infrastructure and sustainable feedstock management.

Significance of Biogas for India's Energy Security

1. **Reducing Import Dependence:** Biogas can reduce India's reliance on imported crude oil, LPG and natural gas by producing energy from locally available organic waste. This strengthens energy security during global supply disruptions.
2. **Renewable and Versatile Fuel:** Biogas is produced through anaerobic digestion of organic matter and mainly contains methane and carbon dioxide. After purification, it becomes **Compressed Biogas (CBG)**, which is chemically identical to CNG and can be used for cooking, transport, electricity generation and heating.
3. **Waste-to-Wealth Approach:** Biogas converts agricultural residues, animal waste and other organic waste into useful energy. This helps manage waste while creating value from resources that are otherwise discarded.
4. **Environmental Benefits:** Biogas is a **renewable and carbon-neutral** fuel. It reduces methane emissions from waste, lowers dependence on fossil fuels and supports India's climate goals.
5. **Economic and Rural Benefits:** Biogas can reduce household fuel costs, generate rural employment and improve sanitation. It also supports farmers by creating new income opportunities from agricultural waste.
6. **Climate Finance Potential:** Biogas projects can earn revenue from both gas sales and **carbon credits**. Each tonne of feedstock can reduce nearly **2.83 tonnes of CO₂**, making projects more attractive for investors.

India's Biogas Journey and Government Initiatives

1. **Early Development:** India's biogas programme began in the late **1950s** through the work of **Dr. Ram Bux Singh**, who established the country's first Gobar Gas plant. This created the foundation for future development.
2. **Expansion in Rural Areas:** The **National Project on Biogas Development (NPBD)** in the 1980s promoted household biogas plants through subsidies. The **Deenbandhu fixed-dome model** introduced in **1984** made plants more affordable by using local materials.
3. **SATAT Initiative:** The **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)** scheme was launched in **2018** with a target of establishing **5,000 CBG plants by 2023**. However, only **132 plants** had been completed by **3 June 2026**, showing slow progress.
4. **GOBARDhan Scheme:** The **GOBARDhan** programme promotes a waste-to-wealth approach by supporting community biogas plants. It provides grants of up to **₹150 lakh per district, ₹564 crore** for biomass collection machinery and **₹994 crore** for pipeline connectivity.
5. **Mandatory CBG Blending:** In **2023**, the government approved mandatory blending of CBG in city gas distribution networks. The blending target starts at **1% in FY26** and will gradually increase to **5% by FY29**.
6. **Learning from Ethanol Blending:** India increased ethanol blending in petrol from **1.5% in 2014** to **20% by December 2025**, five years ahead of the original target. A similar implementation approach is expected for CBG blending.

3. Challenges in Scaling Up Biogas

1. **Infrastructure Constraints:** Slow establishment of CBG plants, inadequate biomass collection systems and limited pipeline connectivity have delayed large-scale expansion.
2. **Financial Barriers:** High initial investment, expensive technology, poor private investment and limited access to formal credit have reduced project viability.
3. **Need for Better Policy Support:** Government financial assistance can improve project viability. Additional incentives such as **accelerated depreciation** and **tax holidays** can attract more private investment.
4. **Feedstock and Crop Diversion Risks:** Higher prices for maize-based ethanol have encouraged farmers to shift towards maize cultivation. This may reduce crop diversity and affect food security if food crops are increasingly used as energy feedstock.
5. **Impact on Agricultural Production:** The **Economic Survey 2026** noted that maize yield increased from **2.56 tonnes per hectare in FY16** to **3.78 tonnes per hectare in FY25**, while yields of soybeans, sunflower, rapeseed, peanuts and millets stagnated or declined. During **FY22–FY25**, maize-based ethanol prices increased at a **CAGR of 11.7%**, making maize more profitable.
6. **Food Security Concerns:** Rising maize cultivation has coincided with declining pulse production and only modest growth in oilseeds and other cereals. Since India already imports large quantities of pulses and edible oils, this trend may increase import dependence and expose domestic food prices to future supply shocks.

Lessons from International Experience

1. **Global Leadership in Biogas:** Europe, China and the United States account for nearly **90% of global biogas production**, showing that strong policy support can rapidly expand the sector.
2. **Germany's Policy Success:** Germany accelerated biogas production after introducing the **Renewable Energy Sources Act, 2000**. Guaranteed income, bonuses and support for small plants encouraged large-scale investment.
3. **Managing Crop Diversion:** Germany's rapid expansion led to excessive maize cultivation, replacing other food crops. The government later imposed limits on maize use in biogas plants to protect agricultural diversity.
4. **Denmark's Sustainable Model:** Denmark aims to use only **biomethane** in its gas system by **2030**. It discourages food crops as feedstock and mainly uses livestock manure and agricultural waste, offering a more sustainable approach.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Infrastructure:** Faster establishment of CBG plants, better biomass collection systems and stronger gas pipeline connectivity are essential for expanding production.
2. **Improve Financial Support:** Easier access to bank credit, government support and carbon market financing can make biogas projects commercially viable.
3. **Encourage Private Participation:** Stable policy support, tax incentives and long-term investment confidence can attract more private companies into the sector.
4. **Promote Decentralised Systems:** Expanding **small (1–25 m³/day)** and **medium (25–2500 m³/day)** biogas plants can support local energy production. A household can replace **1–2 LPG cylinders every month** using daily organic waste.
5. **Adopt Sustainable Feedstock:** Priority should be given to livestock manure, agricultural residues and organic waste instead of food crops. This can strengthen energy security without affecting food security.
6. **Integrate Existing Schemes:** Better coordination between SATAT, GOBARdhan, CBG blending targets and other programmes can accelerate implementation and improve outcomes.

Conclusion

Biogas can become an important pillar of India's energy security by reducing import dependence, promoting clean energy and supporting rural livelihoods. However, its success depends on faster implementation, stronger infrastructure, adequate finance and sustainable feedstock use. A balanced approach can help India expand renewable energy without compromising agricultural diversity or food security.

Question for practice:

Discuss the role of biogas in strengthening India's energy security and examine the challenges in scaling up its adoption.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Right Path for India's Nuclear Power Development

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

Introduction

India's nuclear power programme has evolved from overcoming international sanctions to building strong indigenous capabilities. The successful commissioning of the **500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** marks the beginning of the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme. As India targets **100 GW nuclear capacity by 2047**, the focus is on expanding clean energy through **self-reliance, affordable technology, strong safety standards, and long-term energy security**.

Evolution of India's Nuclear Programme

1. **Impact of International Sanctions:** International sanctions after India's **1974 peaceful nuclear test** restricted imports of uranium and nuclear technology. These restrictions encouraged India to develop its own nuclear technologies and manufacturing capabilities.
2. **Role of the 2008 Civil Nuclear Deal:** The **India–United States Civil Nuclear Deal (2008)** ended restrictions on importing natural uranium and nuclear power plants, with some important exceptions. This improved uranium availability and supported the expansion of India's nuclear programme.
3. **Growth of Indigenous Reactor Capacity:** India steadily increased reactor capacity from **200 MW to 500 MW**, and later developed **700 MW reactors**. **Four 700 MW units are under construction, while another ten are being developed.**
4. **Foundation for Long-Term Self-Reliance:** Continuous investment in domestic research, engineering, and manufacturing created a strong nuclear ecosystem. This reduced dependence on foreign suppliers and strengthened India's technological base.

Indigenous Technological Leadership

1. **Complete Domestic Manufacturing:** Every major component used in India's nuclear power plants has been **designed, developed, tested, and manufactured in India** through cooperation between the **Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)** and Indian industries.
2. **Lowest-Cost Nuclear Power Plants:** India builds nuclear power plants at around **\$1,700 per kW**, compared to nearly **\$2,200 in South Korea**, **over \$5,500 in France**, and about **\$15,000 in the United States**. This makes Indian nuclear technology globally competitive.
3. **Export Potential:** India's combination of low cost and proven technology creates opportunities to become a major exporter of nuclear power plants. The large domestic market also strengthens manufacturing capability.

4. **Need to Avoid Costly Imports:** Importing expensive foreign reactors may increase electricity costs and create technological dependence. Greater use of proven domestic technology offers a more economical and secure option.
5. **Developing Indigenous LWR Technology:** India already manufactures **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** using natural uranium. It should also develop indigenous **Light Water Reactors (LWRs)** because the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** waiver permanently restricts the transfer of enrichment and reprocessing technologies.

Fast Breeder Reactor and Thorium Strategy

1. **Historic PFBR Achievement:** The **500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam** achieved its first criticality on **6 April 2026**. Built by **Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI)** using technology developed by the **Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR)**, it marks India's entry into the second stage of its nuclear programme.
2. **Global Significance:** Once fully operational, India will become **only the second country after Russia** to operate a commercial fast breeder reactor. This reflects decades of scientific work led by the **Department of Atomic Energy**.
3. **Three-Stage Nuclear Programme:** India's programme is based on a **closed nuclear fuel cycle** because the country has limited uranium but abundant thorium reserves. **Each stage produces fuel for the next stage and supports long-term energy independence.**
4. **Role of PHWRs:** In the **first stage**, **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** use natural uranium to generate electricity. The spent fuel produces plutonium, which becomes the fuel for fast breeder reactors.
5. **Role of Fast Breeder Reactors:** Fast breeder reactors use plutonium-based **Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel** and produce more fuel than they consume. They also breed **Uranium-233** from thorium, preparing the way for the third stage.
6. **Thorium-Based Future:** The final stage will use **Uranium-233** as fuel to utilise India's vast thorium reserves. This strategy supports long-term energy security using domestic resources.
7. **Fuel Reprocessing:** The spent fuel from the **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** will be reprocessed and recycled for reuse. This supports efficient fuel utilisation and prepares the way for large-scale thorium use.

Nuclear Expansion Mission

1. **Long-Term Capacity Target:** The Government aims to achieve **100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047**. This supports India's clean energy transition and its **Net Zero target by 2070**.
2. **Current Nuclear Status:** India currently has **8.78 GW** of installed nuclear capacity. Nuclear power generated **56,681 Million Units** in **2024–25** and contributed **3.1%** of total electricity generation.
3. **Planned Growth:** Nuclear capacity is projected to increase to **22.38 GW by 2031–32** through indigenous **700 MW reactors** and **1,000 MW reactors** developed with international cooperation.

4. **Policy and Private Participation:** The sector has been opened to new public and private players through enabling legislation. The **SHANTI Act, 2025** allows limited private participation under regulatory oversight.
5. **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** The **Nuclear Energy Mission** allocates ₹20,000 crore for SMR development. At least **five indigenous SMRs** are planned to become operational by 2033.
6. **BARC's Advanced Reactor Programme:** BARC is developing the **200 MWe Bharat Small Modular Reactor (BSMR-200)**, the **55 MWe SMR-55**, and a **High-Temperature Gas-Cooled Reactor** for hydrogen production.
7. **International Cooperation:** India has signed **Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreements with 18 countries**. These partnerships support peaceful nuclear development while strengthening global confidence in India's programme.

Challenges and Risks

1. **Maintaining Nuclear Safety:** India's nuclear plants have maintained an excellent safety record. This standard must continue as capacity expands and new players enter the sector.
2. **Managing Rapid Expansion:** Large-scale expansion increases the need for skilled project execution and strong safety culture. Industrial safety weaknesses should not affect nuclear facilities.
3. **Careful Entry of New Players:** New participants should first establish a strong internal safety culture before expanding operations. Continuous external auditing will help maintain high safety standards.
4. **Avoiding Public Backlash:** A single serious nuclear accident could weaken public confidence, as seen after the **Chernobyl accident of 1986**. Safety must remain the highest priority during expansion.
5. **Cautious Approach to Foreign SMRs:** Many foreign SMR designs are still under development and have not entered commercial operation. India should prefer tested technologies and avoid becoming the first deployment site for unproven designs.

Way Forward

1. **Expand Indigenous Reactor Technology:** Proven **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)**, **Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)**, and future indigenous reactors should remain the main drivers of nuclear expansion because they are reliable and cost-effective.
2. **Develop Indigenous Light Water Reactors (LWRs):** India should invest in developing **Light Water Reactors (LWRs)** as the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** restrictions do not allow the transfer of enrichment and reprocessing technologies.
3. **Strengthen Domestic Research and Manufacturing:** Continued collaboration between the **Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)**, the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**, and Indian industries should further improve indigenous reactor technologies and manufacturing capacity.

4. **Promote Indigenous Small Modular Reactors (SMRs):** The **Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)** should work with Indian companies to develop smaller indigenous reactors using its **200 MW technology** to meet emerging electricity demand, including artificial intelligence data centres.
5. **Leverage India's Cost Competitiveness:** India's low-cost indigenous reactor technology should be used to expand domestic capacity and strengthen its position as a competitive global supplier of nuclear power plants.
6. **Use International Cooperation Selectively:** International cooperation should complement India's programme without creating technological dependence or increasing the cost of nuclear electricity.

Conclusion

India's nuclear programme has reached a decisive stage with the successful **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** and expanding indigenous capabilities. Achieving **100 GW by 2047** will require affordable domestic technology, strong safety standards, careful expansion, and continued innovation. Following this path can strengthen **energy security, technological self-reliance, clean energy generation, and India's long-term global leadership in nuclear power.**

Question for practice:

Evaluate the right path for India's nuclear power development in the context of indigenous technological capabilities, the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR), and the country's long-term nuclear energy goals.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Tourism can unlock India's journey to a new milestone

Source: The post "**Tourism can unlock India's journey to a new milestone**" has been created based on "**Tourism can unlock India's journey to a new milestone**" published in "Indian Express" on 13th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3 -Indian Economy

Context: Tourism has emerged as a major contributor to India's economy, contributing around **7% of GDP** and **over 9% of total employment**. It not only attracts visitors but also promotes entrepreneurship, infrastructure development, foreign exchange earnings, and strengthens India's soft power.

Economic Significance of Tourism

1. **Contribution to GDP:** Tourism contributes around **7%** to India's Gross Domestic Product, making it an important pillar of economic growth.
2. **Employment Generation:** The sector accounts for **over 9% of total employment**, and every direct job created in tourism generates multiple indirect employment opportunities.
3. **Entrepreneurship Promotion:** Tourism encourages entrepreneurship by creating business opportunities in hotels, transport, handicrafts, food services, and other allied sectors.
4. **Foreign Exchange Earnings:** The tourism sector contributes significantly to foreign exchange earnings by attracting international visitors.
5. **Strengthening Soft Power:** Tourism enhances India's global image by showcasing its rich natural, cultural, and spiritual heritage.

Emerging Opportunities in India's Tourism Sector

1. Post-pandemic Recovery

- a. India's hospitality sector has moved beyond post-pandemic recovery, with strong occupancy levels and average room rates exceeding pre-pandemic levels.
- b. The improved performance of the hospitality sector has increased investor confidence and encouraged capacity expansion and innovation.

2. Growing Investment Potential

- a. Institutional funds, family offices, listed hotel companies, and developers are increasingly investing in the hospitality sector.
- b. Institutional investment remains lower than that in mature global hospitality markets, indicating significant scope for future growth.

3. Expansion to Tier-II and Tier-III Cities: Tourism demand is increasingly expanding beyond metropolitan cities to Tier-II and Tier-III cities, creating a more diversified and resilient tourism ecosystem.

4. Infrastructure-led Tourism Growth

- a. The expansion of regional airports, better road connectivity, and the development of economic and industrial corridors are opening new tourism destinations.
- b. Airport-centric development is increasing demand for hotels through business travel, transit stays, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions).
- c. Every new airport, highway, convention centre, or transport link creates new tourism opportunities and stimulates local investment.

Challenges

1. **Lack of Integrated Planning:** Hospitality development has not yet been fully integrated with broader infrastructure and economic planning.
2. **Limited Institutional Investment:** Institutional investment in India's tourism sector remains below the levels observed in mature hospitality markets.
3. **Destination Readiness:** Many emerging tourist destinations still lack adequate accommodation, visitor facilities, and supporting infrastructure.

Measures Required

1. **Policy Reforms:** The government should grant **industry status** to tourism across all states to improve access to capital and reduce financing costs.
2. **Destination Development:** The government should fast-track the development of **50 tourism destinations** under a mission-mode approach with clear implementation timelines.
3. **Global Promotion:** India should launch a dedicated **Brand Bharat** tourism promotion campaign with sustained financial support to strengthen its global tourism presence.
4. **Visa Reforms:** The government should expand e-visa facilities and simplify entry procedures to attract more international tourists.

5. **Infrastructure Development:** Greater investment should be made in last-mile connectivity, wayside amenities, and digital infrastructure to improve the visitor experience.
6. **Ease of Doing Business:** Taxation should be rationalised in line with global benchmarks, and a single-window clearance system should be introduced to encourage private investment.
7. **Integrated Tourism Planning:** Hospitality development should be integrated with investments in airports, highways, urban infrastructure, and destination development to maximise economic benefits.

Conclusion: Tourism is a strategic economic asset that can generate inclusive growth, employment, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure development. With coordinated policy reforms, infrastructure investment, destination readiness, and stronger global promotion, India can unlock its tourism potential and emerge as a leading global tourism destination while ensuring broad-based prosperity across urban and rural areas.

Question: Tourism is not merely a service sector but a strategic driver of economic growth and employment. Discuss the opportunities and policy measures required to unlock India's tourism potential.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

India-UK CETA stands out for both its breadth and pace

Source: The post “India-UK CETA stands out for both its breadth and pace” has been created based on “India-UK CETA stands out for both its breadth and pace” published in “Business Line” on 15th July 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3 -Indian Economy

Context: The **India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)**, effective from **15 July 2026**, is one of India's most comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with a developed economy. It goes beyond tariff reductions by covering trade, investment, mobility, digital trade, intellectual property, and regulatory cooperation, thereby strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

Key Features of India-UK CETA

1. **Comprehensive Coverage:** The agreement covers goods, services, investment, digital trade, intellectual property rights, government procurement, standards, and regulatory cooperation under a single framework.
2. **Balanced Tariff Liberalisation:**
 - a. Indian exporters receive duty-free or preferential access to the UK market for most product lines.
 - b. The agreement protects India's sensitive sectors, particularly agriculture and dairy, by excluding or providing safeguards for these sectors.
 - c. Tariff reductions for UK exports such as Scotch whisky and automobiles will be implemented gradually through tariff-rate quotas and transition periods to avoid market disruptions.
3. **Social Security Arrangement:** The agreement includes a social security arrangement that prevents Indian professionals in the UK and UK nationals in India from making mandatory social security contributions in both countries for the same period of employment.
4. **Digital and Regulatory Cooperation:** The agreement promotes digital trade, paperless trade, and cooperation in emerging technologies while preserving India's regulatory autonomy and data governance.

5. **Women and Gender Chapter:** CETA includes India's first dedicated chapter on women and gender, which promotes market access, finance, and capacity-building for women entrepreneurs, workers, and artisans.

Benefits for the Indian Economy

1. **Boost to Merchandise Exports:** Indian exporters in textiles, leather, marine products, gems and jewellery, toys, engineering goods, chemicals, auto components, and processed foods will gain greater price competitiveness in the UK market.
2. **Support to MSMEs:** MSMEs will benefit from simplified customs procedures, trade facilitation measures, and greater cooperation on standards and conformity assessment. The agreement can encourage first-time exporters to enter the UK market.
3. **Growth in Services Sector:**
 - a. Indian IT, healthcare, education, and professional service providers will benefit from more predictable market access and improved mobility provisions.
 - b. Better recognition of professional qualifications and the social security arrangement will facilitate overseas employment opportunities for skilled professionals.
4. **Promotion of Innovation and GI Products:**
 - a. Stronger protection for intellectual property rights and Geographical Indications (GI) will enhance the value of Indian products such as teas, spices, textiles, and handicrafts in the UK market.
 - b. Cooperation in research-intensive sectors will support innovation, start-ups, and R&D-based industries.
5. **Inclusive Economic Growth:** The dedicated provisions for women-led enterprises will promote inclusive participation in international trade.

Significance of CETA

1. **Strengthens India-UK Economic Partnership:** The agreement deepens bilateral economic cooperation through trade, investment, mobility, and regulatory collaboration.
2. **Supports India's Global Trade Strategy:** CETA reflects India's evolving approach towards negotiating comprehensive and high-standard FTAs with developed economies.
3. **Creates Long-term Economic Opportunities:** The agreement is expected to generate new exporters, create employment, improve competitiveness, and expand opportunities for professionals, students, MSMEs, and traditional artisans.

Conclusion: The India-UK CETA represents a significant milestone in India's trade policy by combining market access with investment, digital cooperation, mobility, and inclusive development. Its effective implementation can enhance exports, strengthen India's services sector, improve global competitiveness, and contribute to India's long-term economic growth in an evolving global trade architecture.

Question: The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) marks a significant step in India's trade policy. Discuss its key features and the potential benefits for the Indian economy.

Source: [Business Line](#)

India-U.S. Defence Technology Ties — Big Ambitions, Little Delivery

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relation

Introduction

India and the United States have expanded their defence partnership through new technology initiatives, defence trade and strategic cooperation over the past two decades. However, most ambitious defence technology projects have struggled to move beyond political announcements. Differences over technology transfer, export controls, commercial expectations and lengthy negotiations have slowed implementation, leaving the partnership stronger in defence procurement than in defence-industrial collaboration.

Evolution of India-U.S. Defence Technology Cooperation

1. **Expansion of Defence Partnership:** India-U.S. defence ties have grown steadily since 2002. India has purchased **over \$22 billion** worth of U.S. defence equipment, making the U.S. one of India's major defence suppliers.
2. **Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI):** Launched in **2012**, DTTI aimed to promote co-development and co-production of defence systems. Despite years of discussions, it failed to deliver any major military capability.
3. **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET):** Introduced in **2022**, iCET expanded cooperation into defence, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, space, biotechnology, drones and resilient supply chains. Its flagship defence project, the **GE F414 engine**, is still under negotiation.
4. **INDUS-X Initiative:** Started in **2023**, INDUS-X sought to connect defence start-ups, industry and academia. However, it has not yet produced any significant co-development outcomes.
5. **New Defence Cooperation Frameworks:** The **Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA)** programme focuses on tracking submarines, protecting seabed infrastructure and strengthening surveillance in the Indian Ocean. The proposed **Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA)** is expected to deepen defence trade but also raises concerns about competition for India's domestic industry.

Status of Key Defence Technology and Industrial Collaboration Projects

1. **GE F414 Fighter Engine:** The project was announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **2023 U.S. visit** as the flagship outcome of iCET. However, negotiations remain unresolved because of disagreements over technology transfer, intellectual property, export controls and rising costs, with the estimated engine price increasing from about **₹70-80 crore to over ₹200 crore**.
2. **Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missile:** Discussions on acquiring and co-producing the Javelin missile have continued for more than **16 years**. The programme remains unresolved despite repeated political support.
3. **Stryker Infantry Combat Vehicle:** The proposed partnership aims to adapt the vehicle for Indian conditions, including high-altitude operations. However, localisation, user trials, production arrangements and commercial negotiations remain incomplete.

4. **MQ-9B Unmanned Aerial Vehicles:** India signed a **\$3.5–4 billion** agreement in **2024** to acquire **31 MQ-9B SeaGuardian and SkyGuardian drones**. While the project includes maintenance infrastructure, it does not provide local assembly or meaningful transfer of core technology.

Factors Hindering Defence Technology Cooperation

1. **Different Strategic Priorities:** India views defence cooperation as a way to acquire advanced technology, strengthen domestic manufacturing and support **Atmanirbhar Bharat**. The United States treats advanced defence technologies as strategic assets that require strict control.
2. **Export Control Restrictions:** U.S. defence exports are governed by the **International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR)**. These rules restrict the transfer of technical knowledge and manufacturing expertise even when broader strategic relations improve.
3. **Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Issues:** India seeks access to manufacturing know-how and intellectual property to build long-term capability. The United States remains cautious about sharing sensitive technologies, slowing negotiations on major projects like the **GE F414 engine**.
4. **Commercial and Procurement Challenges:** Major projects often involve disagreements over costs, investment, localisation and licensing arrangements. Multiple Indian agencies negotiating separately with the same supplier also make agreements more difficult to conclude.
5. **Lengthy Regulatory Procedures:** Defence projects pass through several rounds of negotiations, evaluations, approvals and oversight in both countries. These processes slow implementation even when both governments support the partnership.

Structural Characteristics of India–U.S. Defence Cooperation

1. **Strategic Partnership with Limited Industrial Depth:** Military exercises, logistics agreements and interoperability have expanded steadily. However, defence-industrial cooperation has not progressed at the same pace.
2. **Announcement-Implementation Gap:** Successive initiatives have been described as historic or transformational. Yet, many have remained stuck in negotiations without producing expected industrial outcomes.
3. **Procurement over Technology Transfer:** India-U.S. defence ties have expanded mainly through equipment purchases. However, meaningful co-production and transfer of advanced technologies have remained limited.
4. **High-Maintenance, Low-Deliverability:** Defence industry officials describe the partnership as "high maintenance, but low deliverability." Projects often take years because of lengthy negotiations and regulatory procedures.
5. **Future Frameworks Face Similar Risks:** New initiatives such as **UDA** and the proposed **RDPA** will also depend on resolving the same structural issues that affected earlier programmes.

India's Experience with Other Defence Partners

1. **Russia:** Russia remains India's largest defence supplier with around **45–55%** of defence imports. It has generally been the most flexible partner by supporting licensed production, local assembly and co-development projects such as the **BrahMos** missile.
2. **Israel:** Israel accounts for around **10–15%** of India's defence imports and is known for quick delivery of drones, air defence systems and precision-guided weapons. It has shown flexibility in integrating Indian systems, although it also protects its most sensitive technologies.
3. **France:** France contributes around **10–20%** of India's imports through platforms such as the **Rafale** fighter aircraft and **Scorpene** submarines. It has generally offered greater flexibility on technology transfer and industrial participation than most Western partners, while retaining control over critical technologies like fighter aircraft source codes.
4. **United States:** The U.S. also contributes around **10–15%** of India's defence imports and supplies some of the world's most advanced military equipment. However, strict export controls, Congressional oversight, end-use monitoring and limited flexibility in technology sharing make it India's most demanding defence partner.
5. **Comparative Assessment:** Industry assessments generally rank **Russia first, followed by Israel, France and the United States** in terms of ease of concluding defence deals and adapting equipment to Indian requirements. Unlike Russia, Israel and France, the U.S. system allows very little flexibility in modifying imported military systems for Indian operational needs.

Conclusion

India-U.S. defence ties have grown into a strong strategic partnership, but defence technology cooperation continues to lag behind political ambition. Future initiatives such as the **UDA programme** and **RDPA** will succeed only if both countries address technology transfer concerns, regulatory barriers and implementation delays, enabling defence cooperation to move beyond procurement towards genuine industrial collaboration.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the progress, challenges and future prospects of India–U.S. defence technology cooperation in achieving meaningful defence-industrial collaboration.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

What is 'Trial in Absentia'?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Judiciary

Introduction

A **trial in absentia** is a criminal trial conducted without the physical presence of the accused. **Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)** introduces this provision for proclaimed offenders who deliberately evade trial and cannot be arrested soon. The law seeks to prevent serious criminal cases from remaining pending, while prescribing safeguards to protect the accused's right to a fair trial and maintain the balance between public interest and individual rights.

Meaning of Trial in Absentia

1. **Definition:** A **trial in absentia** means a criminal trial conducted in the absence of the accused before the court.
2. **Basic principle:** The law is based on the idea that a person who deliberately avoids the court may be treated as having waived the right to remain present during the trial.
3. **Exceptional procedure:** The presence of the accused remains the normal rule in criminal trials. Trial in absentia is an exception used only in limited and serious situations.
4. **Purpose:** It prevents criminal proceedings from remaining pending only because the accused continues to evade the legal process.

Legal Framework under Section 356 of BNSS

1. **Statutory basis:** **Section 356 of the BNSS** provides the legal authority to conduct a full criminal trial in the absence of the accused.
2. **Conditions for use:** The provision applies only when a proclaimed offender has absconded to avoid trial and there is **no immediate prospect of arrest**.
3. **Judicial satisfaction:** Before proceeding, the court must record its reasons in writing to justify conducting the trial without the accused.
4. **Court's powers:** Once the legal conditions are fulfilled, the court may continue the inquiry, conduct the trial and pronounce judgment as if the accused were present.
5. **Part of criminal law reform:** The BNSS replaces the **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973**, and introduces a complete legal framework for trial in absentia.

Applicability and Procedural Safeguards

1. **Limited applicability:** The provision applies only to a **proclaimed offender** declared under **Section 84 of the BNSS**. It cannot be used against every absconding accused.
2. **Serious offences only:** Trial in absentia is limited to offences punishable with **imprisonment of 10 years or more, life imprisonment or death** under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**, or any other law.
3. **Declaration as proclaimed offender:** A court may declare a person a proclaimed offender after the required inquiry if the person fails to appear following a proclamation.
4. **Repeated attempts to secure presence:** Before starting the trial, **two consecutive warrants of arrest** must be issued with an interval of at least **30 days**.
5. **Notice to the accused:** A notice must be published in a local or national newspaper, displayed at the accused's last known residence, and a relative or friend must also be informed. The accused gets **30 days** to appear.

6. **Opportunity for defence:** The trial cannot begin until **90 days** after framing of charges. If the accused has no lawyer, the court must appoint one at the **State's expense**.
7. **Protection of evidence:** Statements of prosecution witnesses recorded before the trial may be used as evidence. If the accused later appears or is arrested, the court may allow cross-examination in the interest of justice.
8. **Use of technology:** Witness examination should, as far as possible, be recorded through **audiovisual electronic means**. These recordings must be preserved to maintain transparency and facilitate later review.

How BNSS Differs from the CrPC

1. **Earlier legal position:** The **CrPC** allowed proclamation, attachment of property, recording of evidence in the absence of an absconding accused and limited exemption from personal appearance.
2. **Limited scope under CrPC:** These provisions did not permit a complete criminal trial and pronouncement of judgment against an absconding accused.
3. **Judicial discretion under the CrPC:** The **CrPC** allowed courts to proceed without the accused's personal attendance only in limited situations, such as when personal presence was unnecessary in the interest of justice or when the accused repeatedly disturbed the proceedings.
4. **Major reform under BNSS: Section 356** allows a full trial and judgment against proclaimed offenders, reducing delays caused by accused persons who continue to evade arrest.
5. **Change in criminal procedure:** The new law shifts the focus from merely preserving evidence to completing the entire judicial process in eligible cases.

Significance and Concerns

1. **Speedy disposal of serious cases:** The provision helps courts continue proceedings instead of keeping grave criminal cases pending for years because an accused cannot be arrested.
2. **Public interest:** It seeks to ensure that deliberate evasion of the law does not defeat the administration of justice or delay the conclusion of serious criminal trials.
3. **Balance through safeguards:** The law includes safeguards such as judicial approval, waiting periods, public notice, legal aid and audiovisual recording to reduce the risk of unfair trials.
4. **Fair trial concerns:** The absence of the accused during stages such as cross-examination and sentencing may limit the ability to challenge evidence and raise questions about the fairness of the trial.
5. **International standards: Article 14(3)(d) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** recognises the accused's right to be tried in their presence. Limited exceptions are accepted only with strong procedural safeguards.

6. **Possibility of misuse:** Concerns remain that broad use of the provision may weaken fair trial rights if sufficient efforts are not made to secure the accused's presence or if its scope expands beyond exceptional cases.

Conclusion

Trial in absentia under the **BNSS** is a significant criminal justice reform that enables courts to conclude cases involving proclaimed offenders accused of grave offences who deliberately evade trial. However, it should remain an exceptional measure and be used only with strict compliance with the prescribed safeguards. This is essential to protect **speedy justice, public interest and the fundamental right to a fair**.

Question for practice:

Examine the concept of trial in absentia under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), highlighting its legal framework, procedural safeguards, significance, and concerns.

Sources: [The Hindu](#)