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Features :

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

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SEBI shouldn't have gone in for CAS

Source: The post **"SEBI shouldn't have gone in for CAS"** has been created based on **"SEBI shouldn't have gone in for CAS"** published in **"Business Line"** on 01st September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Economy

Context: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) introduced the **Closing Auction Session (CAS) from August 3, 2026**, replacing the earlier VWAP-based mechanism for determining the closing price of stock derivatives. However, its initial experience has raised concerns about its suitability for India's retail-heavy and high-frequency derivatives market.

Issues associated with CAS

1. **Increased market volatility:** On the first monthly expiry after CAS, Sensex fell nearly **2,200 points in five minutes** and recovered around **2,000 points within seven minutes**, creating unprecedented price swings.
2. **Cash-derivatives asymmetry:** The cash market awaits its final price while the derivatives market remains open till **3:40 pm**, creating opportunities for sophisticated traders.
3. **Retail investor vulnerability:** Despite regulatory measures, **87.7% of individual derivatives traders continued to lose money**, showing their vulnerability against technologically sophisticated participants.
4. **Possibility of price manipulation:** Unlike VWAP, which reflects continuous transactions over 30 minutes, an auction can allow a large order imbalance to significantly influence the equilibrium price.
5. **Technological asymmetry:** Professional proprietary traders, algorithmic traders and FPIs possess greater technological capabilities than retail participants.
6. **Inadequate stress-testing:** CAS appears to have been transplanted from mature markets such as the **NYSE and Nasdaq** without adequately considering India's different market structure.
7. **Regulatory concerns:** The earlier **Jane Street case** and subsequent action against **Copthall Mauritius and Mansi Stock & Share Brokerage** demonstrate the risks of sophisticated derivatives strategies interacting with relatively thin underlying markets.

Way Forward

1. SEBI should **immediately review and stress-test CAS** under extreme market conditions.
2. The mechanism should be aligned with India's **retail-heavy, high-frequency and speculative derivatives structure**.
3. Stronger surveillance should be established to detect **algorithmic manipulation and abnormal order imbalances.**
4. Regulatory reforms should prioritise **market stability and investor protection** rather than merely copying global practices.

Conclusion: Global best practices cannot be mechanically transplanted into markets with different structures. CAS should therefore be **reassessed and modified or reversed if necessary**, after rigorous empirical testing and consultation with market participants.

Question: The introduction of the Closing Auction Session (CAS) in India's derivatives market has raised concerns regarding market stability, retail investor protection and regulatory suitability. Discuss the issues associated with CAS and suggest the way forward.

Source: [Business Line]

The Baltic Way — Gandhi's Imprint on Baltic Freedom

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-International relations **And Papers 1-** History

Introduction

The **Baltic Way of 23 August 1989** was a peaceful mass mobilisation in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia against Soviet rule. Around **two million people formed a 675-kilometre human chain** from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius. Inspired partly by **Gandhian non-violence**, it became a major turning point in the Baltic independence struggle and contributed to the restoration of independence in **1990–91**.

Historical Background: From Soviet Occupation to the Baltic Way

1. **Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, 1939:** The Nazi Germany–Soviet Union pact contained secret protocols dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence, placing the Baltic states under Soviet control.

2. **Soviet Annexation, 1940:** The Soviet Union occupied and annexed Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1940, ending the independence they had regained in 1918, after 22 years.

3. **Long Period of Occupation:** After World War II, the Baltic states remained under Soviet rule for almost **50 years**, while several countries, including the United States, refused to recognise their incorporation into the USSR.

4. **Early Resistance and Remembrance:** Joint commemorative actions began in **1986**, followed by rallies in 1987 and larger national movement-led demonstrations in 1988 across Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn.

5. **Singing Revolution:** From **1986 to 1991**, Baltic independence movements used songs, cultural expression and peaceful mobilisation during Gorbachev's **perestroika and glasnost.**

6. **Purpose of the Baltic Way:** Held on the **50th anniversary of the 1939 Pact**, the human chain exposed its secret protocol and demanded freedom and restoration of independence.

The Baltic Way: People Power Through Non-Violence

1. **Mass Human Chain:** On **23 August 1989 at 7 p.m.**, approximately two million people joined hands across a **675-kilometre route** linking the three Baltic capitals.

2. **Peaceful Civic Resistance:** The mobilisation used collective civilian action rather than armed confrontation, showing that people could publicly challenge Soviet rule through non-violent means.

3. **Unity Across Three States:** Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians acted together with a common purpose, making unity, solidarity and brotherhood central strengths of the independence movement.

4. **Democratic Aspiration:** The Baltic Way demonstrated the people's shared belief in **democracy, freedom and national self-determination**, strengthening political engagement for independence.

5. **International Attention:** Extensive global publicity drew attention to the Baltic demand for freedom and helped communicate their opposition to Soviet domination beyond the region.

Gandhi's Influence on the Baltic Freedom Movement

1. **Gandhian Principles:** Baltic activists drew upon **ahimsa, satyagraha, civil resistance, non-cooperation, civil disobedience and mass mobilisation** to challenge foreign rule without violence.

2. **People's Consent:** Gandhi's approach showed that political authority depends on people's consent and cooperation, providing an important basis for civilian resistance against Soviet control.

3. **Choice of Gandhi:** Latvian scholar **Maija Kūle** noted that activists, lacking local theorists of non-violent resistance, looked to Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

4. **Lithuanian Civilian Defence:** Lithuania played an important role in developing **non-violent civilian-based defence**, with non-violence understood as essential from the beginning of the independence movement.

5. **Non-Cooperation with Occupation:** The December 1990 **"Republic in Danger" declaration** called for non-violence and non-cooperation with the occupying authorities.

6. **Gandhi as a Practical Model:** Gražina Miniotaitė considered Gandhi especially successful because he demonstrated through both theory and practice that non-violent struggle could resist foreign rule.

7. **Public Exposure to Gandhi:** Richard Attenborough's **1982 film *Gandhi*** was broadcast on Lithuanian national television to educate citizens about non-violent resistance.

Impact and International Legacy of the Baltic Way

1. **Soviet Recognition:** Following the Baltic Way, the USSR acknowledged the existence of the **Hitler–Stalin Pact and declared it null and void**, marking a significant step towards Baltic independence.

2. **Political Change in Latvia:** The movement weakened and divided the Communist Party, while some leaders supported independence, helping the national movement gain enough votes to adopt Latvia's **Declaration of Independence on 4 May 1990**.

3. **Restoration of Independence:** The wider independence process culminated in the **restoration of independence in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia during 1990–91.**

4. **Global Democratic Symbol:** The Baltic Way became an international symbol of peaceful resistance, democratic aspirations and the ability of united citizens to challenge political domination.

5. **Recognition of Historical Legacy:** In **2009**, the Baltic Way was included in UNESCO's **Memory of the World Register**, strengthening its international historical significance.

6. **Influence Beyond the Baltics:** Its example inspired other freedom movements and contributed to wider developments in Europe, including the **reunification of Germany**.

India-Baltic Ties and Contemporary Relevance

1. **Growing Bilateral Cooperation:** Since **1992**, India and the Baltic states have expanded cooperation in **technology, sustainability, the blue economy and culture**, building on historical connections.

2. **Trade Relations:** In **2025–26**, India's bilateral trade reached **$490.61 million with Lithuania, $475.66 million with Latvia and $219.69 million with Estonia**.

3. **Historical Gandhian Links:** Connections include **Hermann Kallenbach, Vydūnas, Antanas Poška, Sonja Schlesin and Linnart Hall**, reflecting long-standing Baltic engagement with Gandhi's ideas.

4. **Cultural Commemoration:** Gandhi–Kallenbach memorial activities, Memorial Lectures, the India–Lithuania Friendship Award and Gandhi memorials in Latvia and Estonia continue these links.

5. **2026 Commemoration in India:** On **23 August 2026**, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia commemorated the Baltic Way at the **National Gandhi Museum, Rajghat**, linking the event with Gandhi's philosophy of peaceful resistance.

6. **Gandhi's Continuing Legacy:** Lithuania gifted a **portrait of Gandhi**, while the three Baltic embassies presented historical photographs of the 1989 Baltic Way, reinforcing their shared Gandhian connection.

7. **Contemporary Relevance:** The Baltic Way remains a reminder to uphold **international law, self-determination, territorial integrity and a rules-based international order**, especially when national borders face force.

Conclusion

The Baltic Way showed the strength of **united, non-violent civilian resistance** against political domination. Its Gandhian influence connected India's freedom struggle with the Baltic quest for independence. Its continuing legacy lies in defending **democracy, self-determination, territorial integrity and international law**, while preserving historical memory for future generations.

Question for practice:

Discuss the Gandhian influence on the Baltic Way and its role in the restoration of Baltic independence.
Source: The Hindu

The Broken Promise of the Right to Work

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Employment

Introduction

The Supreme Court's recent observations on minimum wages have renewed the debate over the constitutional foundations of the right to work. The debate has gained importance after MGNREGA was replaced by the VB-GRAM G Act in 2025. The shift has weakened the earlier demand-driven employment guarantee, while capped funding, greater State fiscal burden, lower wages and reduced employment have raised concerns about rural livelihoods and the broader constitutional commitment to the right to work in rural India.

Constitutional Foundations of the Right to Work

1. **Right to work as a constitutional goal:** The Constituent Assembly broadly accepted the importance of the right to work but differed over making it a Fundamental Right or a Directive Principle.

2. **K.T. Shah's position:** K.T. Shah supported a Fundamental Right to work because he believed the State needed a positive legal duty to ensure socio-economic security for citizens.

3. **B.R. Ambedkar's position:** B.R. Ambedkar viewed the right to work as essential but considered immediate universal enforcement fiscally and institutionally difficult for newly independent India.

4. **Directive Principles as the chosen framework:** The right to work was placed under the **Directive Principles of State Policy**, which guide governments in making laws and policies but do not automatically create enforceable rights.

5. **Article 41 and employment: Article 41** directs the State to provide for the right to work within the limits of its economic capacity and development.

6. **Broader welfare commitments: Articles 39, 42 and 43** support adequate livelihood, equal pay, humane working conditions, living wages and a decent standard of life.

From Constitutional Aspiration to a Statutory Right

1. **Olga Tellis and livelihood:** In **Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)**, the Supreme Court held that livelihood was necessary for the effective enjoyment of the Fundamental Right to life.

2. **MGNREGA's statutory breakthrough:** The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was enacted in **2005**, making a pan-India statutory right to rural employment a reality for the first time.

3. **Demand-driven employment guarantee:** MGNREGA created a framework where the State had a statutory obligation to provide employment, although the guarantee remained limited to **100 days per rural household**.

4. **Minimum wage obligation:** MGNREGA initially carried a statutory obligation to provide employment at **minimum wages**, strengthening the practical basis of the right to work.

5. **MGNREGA's development role:** Despite its limited scope and chronic underfunding, MGNREGA became an important instrument for **rural development and employment generation**.

Weakening of the Employment and Wage Guarantee

1. **Wages delinked from minimum wages:** In **2009**, MGNREGA wages were delinked from the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, weakening the connection between employment guarantee and minimum wage protection.

2. **Stagnant rural wages:** MGNREGA wages barely kept pace with inflation and remained below minimum agricultural wages in most States, reducing the real benefit of employment.

3. **Inadequate employment funding:** Limited budgets for generating employment reduced household earnings, with estimated household earnings in **July and August this year falling by half** compared with the same months last year.

Retreat from the Right to Work: Legal and Economic Concerns

1. **Replacement by VB-GRAM G:** In **December 2025**, the Union government replaced MGNREGA with the **Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar & Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act**, implemented from July 1.

2. **Sharp fall in employment:** MGNREGA averaged 3.44 crore households and 44 crore person-days in July and August over five years, while employment fell by 68% this year.

3. **Capped funding and State burden:** The new framework places an arbitrary cap on funds and a greater fiscal burden on States already facing borrowing constraints under the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management framework**.

4. **Reduced universality:** Provisions allowing certain areas to be denotified and excluded from the scheme weaken the universal character of the earlier right to work.

5. **Minimum wage concern:** The Supreme Court observed that, with unchanged financial resources, a minimum wage threshold could reduce the number of workers receiving employment.

6. **Sanjit Roy and Article 23:** In *Sanjit Roy v. State of Rajasthan (1983)*, the Supreme Court held that paying below minimum wages violates **Article 23** and is akin to forced labour.

7. **Concern over non-retrogression:** The doctrine of **non-retrogression**, affirmed in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, suggests that the State should not deliberately undo an already achieved level of rights and legal protection.

Way Forward: Reaffirming the Right to Work

1. **Economic rationale for higher wages:** Higher wages can raise rural purchasing power, increase demand for goods and services, improve human development and create a multiplier effect that supports economic productivity.

2. **Link wages with living wages:** Employment-guarantee wages should be linked with **living wages** so that rural workers receive adequate income and the constitutional commitment becomes meaningful.

3. **Ensure timely wage payments:** Timely payment of wages should be ensured because delays weaken the practical value of an employment guarantee.

4. **Strengthen social audits:** Social audits should receive greater attention, with local institutions empowered to help identify and reduce corruption.

5. **Empower Panchayati Raj Institutions:** Panchayati Raj Institutions should receive greater powers so that local bodies can play a stronger role in implementing employment guarantees.

6. **Restore a stronger legal framework:** A stronger and more universal legal framework for the right to work can advance constitutional aims while supporting rural incomes and economic growth.

Conclusion

The right to work began as a **constitutional aspiration**, became a statutory guarantee through MGNREGA, and now faces dilution under VB-GRAM G. Reaffirming employment, adequate wages, timely payments and local accountability can strengthen socio-economic rights while also creating a **positive cycle between rural development, demand and economic growth**.

Question for practice:

Examine the constitutional and economic concerns arising from the weakening of the right to work in India.
Source: [The Hindu]

Parali solution may lie closer to the farm

Source: The post "Parali solution may lie closer to the farm" has been created based on "Parali solution may lie closer to the farm" published in "Indian Express" on 2nd September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Science and technology

Context: The global technology race is increasingly shifting from developing individual AI models to creating an **ecosystem that connects science with industry**. China is moving from manufacturing strength towards original scientific discovery, while the US is attempting to reconnect its strong scientific base with domestic manufacturing. India needs to bridge a similar gap.

China and US: Different routes, similar objective

1. **China:** It is leveraging its vast manufacturing ecosystem to apply AI to robotics, automobiles, biotechnology, materials, energy, agriculture and research. It spent about **2.8% of GDP on R&D in 2025**, with basic-research expenditure rising by 11%.
2. **United States:** It seeks to leverage its universities, laboratories, technology companies and capital markets while rebuilding domestic manufacturing and reducing vulnerabilities caused by globalised supply chains.
3. **Common objective:** Both countries share a common objective: to build a continuous ecosystem linking AI, scientific discovery, technological innovation, manufacturing, and ultimately economic and geopolitical power.

Challenges before India

1. **Low R&D spending:** India's R&D expenditure is only **0.64% of GDP**, compared with around 2.8% in China and 3.5% in the US.
2. **Weak private-sector participation:** Indian private capital has largely retreated from long-term investment in basic research and frontier technologies.
3. **Institutional rigidity:** India has not undertaken a major reform of its scientific institutions comparable to China's post-1970s science reforms.
4. **Talent retention:** Despite producing a large scientific talent pool, India struggles to attract and retain researchers, particularly in advanced fields.
5. **Weak science–industry linkage:** Universities, laboratories, entrepreneurs, finance and manufacturing are not sufficiently integrated to convert discoveries into commercially viable technologies.
6. **Excessive bureaucratisation:** State-led scientific institutions have suffered from bureaucratic structures, which can constrain innovation and experimentation.
7. **Misplaced technological sovereignty:** Excessive emphasis on self-reliance can isolate India from global science, capital, technology and talent.

Way Forward

1. Increase **public and private R&D expenditure**, especially in basic and frontier research.
2. Reform scientific institutions to provide greater **autonomy, flexibility and accountability**.
3. Build stronger university–industry–startup linkages and facilitate technology transfer.
4. Attract global talent while creating incentives for Indian researchers to return.
5. Develop domestic manufacturing and supply chains alongside integration with global technology networks.
6. Use AI missions in **semiconductors, robotics, quantum technology and other strategic sectors** to connect research with production.
7. Encourage Indian industry to revive the tradition of supporting scientific institutions, as seen historically through **Jamsetji Tata, Homi Bhabha and the Tata Trusts**.

Conclusion: India must avoid choosing between **global cooperation and technological self-reliance**. It needs to walk on both legs—deepening access to global science, technology, capital and talent while strengthening domestic research, manufacturing and institutions. The ultimate goal should be to convert **scientific capability into industrial capability and national power**.

Question: China and the US are attempting to bridge the gap between scientific discovery and industrial production. In this context, examine the challenges before India in building a globally competitive science–industry ecosystem.

Source: [Indian Express]

China-US Race in Science-Industry Linkages: India Must Catch Up

Source: The post "**China-US Race in Science-Industry Linkages: India Must Catch Up"** has been created based on "**China-US Race in Science-Industry Linkages: India Must Catch Up"** published in "Indian Express" on 2nd September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Economy

Context: Paddy straw or **parali** has traditionally been treated as agricultural waste, leading to its burning due to its bulky nature, low value and the narrow window available before wheat sowing. However, growing demand from **power plants, CBG units and pellet manufacturers** has given paddy straw an emerging economic value of around **₹1.5–2/kg in parts of Punjab**.

Reason for persisting stubble burning

1. **Bulky residue:** Paddy straw is bulky and costly to transport over long distances.
2. **Narrow sowing window:** Farmers have limited time between paddy harvesting and wheat sowing.
3. **Cost of alternatives:** Collection, baling, storage and transportation involve additional costs.
4. **Limited local value addition:** Farmers generally supply raw straw, while value addition takes place after it leaves the village.
5. **Burning is quick and economical:** Where alternatives involve cost, labour and uncertainty, burning remains an attractive option.

Potential of decentralised biochar processing

1. **Biochar production:** Biochar is a carbon-rich material produced by heating biomass under limited oxygen. About **100 kg of dry parali can yield around 30 kg of biochar.**
2. **Improves soil quality:** Its application can improve **water retention and nutrient-use efficiency**.
3. **Carbon sequestration:** Unlike burning, which releases much of the carbon into the atmosphere, biochar can retain a significant share of carbon in soil for **a century or longer**.
4. **Addresses Punjab's agricultural stress:** It can potentially help address **declining soil quality and intensive fertiliser use** within the rice-wheat system.
5. **Reduces transportation costs:** Processing near farms reduces the need to transport bulky raw straw over long distances.
6. **Creates local value:** Farmers and local institutions can capture a greater share of the value generated from their agricultural residue.

Proposed village-level model

1. A **technology provider** can initially install and operate the biochar unitIt can **train local operators** and ensure quality and emission standards.
2. Over time, ownership and operational capacity can be transferred to an **FPO, SHG, cooperative or other credible local institution.**
3. Farmers can bring straw to a **nearby processing point**, similar to taking wheat to a village flour mill.
4. A portion of the biochar can be **returned to farmers' fields**, while the remaining quantity can be sold where markets exist.
5. The **government need not operate thousands of units**; instead, it can provide standards, training, concessional finance and initial support.
6. **Panchayats** can facilitate land availability and local coordination.

Significance

1. **Economic:** Converts agricultural waste into a marketable resource and enables greater farmer-level value addition.
2. **Environmental:** Reduces open-field burning and associated carbon emissions.
3. **Agricultural:** Returns a useful product to soil and can improve soil health and water-use efficiency.

4. **Rural development:** Creates local processing capabilities and potentially generates employment.
5. **Behavioural:** Making residue economically valuable can create a stronger incentive against burning than enforcement alone.

Way Forward: A shift is required from merely asking **"How can straw be removed without burning?"** to asking **"Where should value from parali be created, and who should capture it?"** Decentralised processing can make alternatives to burning economically viable by bringing technology closer to farms.

Conclusion: The **village chakki model** demonstrates that agricultural commodities need not travel long distances merely for processing. Similarly, decentralised biochar units can process paddy residue closer to farms, **reduce transport costs, create local value, improve soil health and provide farmers with an economic incentive to avoid burning.** Thus, the solution to parali burning may lie closer to the farm itself.
Question: The solution to the problem of paddy straw burning may lie in decentralised, village-level processing rather than merely in transporting crop residue away from farms." Discuss the potential of biochar-based decentralised processing in addressing stubble burning and improving farm-level value addition.

Source: Indian Express

The Two Balance Sheets Behind Every E-Waste Decision

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3-Environment and Bio-diversity Conservation

Introduction

India's rising e-waste is both an environmental challenge and an untapped source of valuable metals and critical minerals. Its management requires looking beyond immediate disposal or resale costs because recycling decisions also affect **resource security, import dependence, environmental protection, data security and domestic industrial capability**. The core issue is to shift from the lowest visible cost towards decisions that account for the **full long-term value and costs of e-waste management**.

India's Growing E-Waste and the Untapped Resource

1. **Rising e-waste generation:** India generated **6.2 million tonnes in FY24**, projected to exceed **14 million tonnes by 2030**, widening the recovery challenge.

2. **Large material value:** E-waste contains nearly **33% metals**, while its embedded economic value is estimated at **Rs 51,000 crore**, showing its resource potential.

3. **Limited formal recycling:** Formal recycling capacity is around **2 million tonnes**, and about **10% of e-waste** is formally recycled, leaving substantial waste outside organised processing.

4. **Large recovery gap:** Of the Rs 30,600 crore technically recoverable value, the informal sector accounts for Rs 6,545 crore, while the formal sector contributes Rs 2,805 crore.

5. **Value lost or locked:** Nearly **Rs 21,250 crore** is lost through inefficiencies, while another **Rs 20,400 crore** remains locked because current technologies cannot extract it.

6. **Battery waste opportunity:** Lithium-ion battery demand may rise from **29 GWh in 2025 to 248 GWh by 2035**, with waste volumes increasing nearly ninefold.

For detailed information on **New e-waste rules and India's e-waste challenge read this article here**

The Two Balance Sheets: Immediate Cost vs Long-Term Value

1. **Immediate financial balance sheet:** Organisations mainly assess purchase price, resale value, savings and processing costs because these figures are visible, measurable and reflected in budgets.
2. **Long-term strategic balance sheet:** Decisions also affect **resource security, environmental sustainability, data security, public health, industrial capability, supply-chain resilience and national competitiveness**.
3. **Hidden costs return later:** Pollution can increase healthcare and remediation costs, while resource depletion can raise import dependence and manufacturing costs.
4. **Lowest price is not lowest lifetime cost:** Renewable energy, batteries, electronics and advanced manufacturing increasingly require decisions based on **long-term value** rather than acquisition cost alone.
5. **Procurement as industrial policy:** Value-based procurement can influence which technologies scale and which domestic capabilities develop, making purchasing decisions relevant to industrial capacity.
6. **Early investment can create future gains:** Investments that initially appear expensive can become economically stronger through scale, learning and development of domestic manufacturing capability.
7. **Responsible recycler selection:** A recycler should be assessed for secure data destruction, refurbishment before recycling, and efficient, transparent recovery of critical minerals.

Why India's Recycling System Recovers Only Part of the Value

1. **Narrow material focus:** The current framework mainly covers **copper, aluminium, iron and gold**, while a wider basket of critical minerals remains outside effective recovery.
2. **Unequal battery economics:** Low-value chemistries such as **lithium ferro phosphate** are unattractive to recyclers because they lack high-value metals and differentiated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) pricing.
3. **Mismatch with product life:** Batteries designed for **15–30 years** of operation face EPR cycles that begin much earlier, creating a mismatch between regulation and material reality.
4. **Weak traceability:** Missing mandatory chemical-composition disclosure and limited integration between Goods and Services Tax (GST) systems and EPR portals make recycling claims difficult to verify.
5. **Informal sector dependence:** The informal sector remains central to collection and recovery but continues to operate without formal recognition within the system.

6. **Costly advanced recycling:** Sophisticated technology, secure data destruction, compliant processing, collection, segregation and traceable supply chains increase the cost of safe material recovery.

7. **Compliance does not ensure recovery:** Meeting compliance targets can still leave valuable materials unrecovered when the system focuses on selected metals rather than overall material recovery.

Government Initiatives

1. **Evolution of e-waste regulation:** E-waste was covered under Hazardous Waste Management Rules before 2011; the **2011 Rules** introduced dedicated management, followed by the **2016 Rules**.

2. **Extended Producer Responsibility:** The **2016 Rules** notified **21 electrical and electronic equipment items** for tracking and promoted Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for collection and recycling.

3. **E-Waste Management Rules, 2022:** The Rules aim to protect health and the environment by managing the impacts of electronic waste.

4. **Central Pollution Control Board guidelines:** The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** established lifespan norms for electronic items to improve e-waste forecasting and management.

5. **Awareness and training:** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's awareness programme provides training, tools and films to reduce e-waste's environmental and health impacts.

6. **Swachh Digital Bharat:** The programme promotes awareness about risks from unorganised recycling and encourages people to give e-waste only to authorised recyclers.

7. **Greene platform:** Greene is a dedicated website designed to spread awareness about e-waste through social media and support better public understanding.

8. **Paryavaran NITI Manthan:** The **May 2026** conference brought policymakers, regulators and industry together to discuss circular economy implementation and EPR in e-waste.

9. **Common EPR portal:** Plans for a common EPR portal, beginning with plastics, indicate efforts to streamline compliance systems and improve coordination across waste-management frameworks.

Way Forward

1. **Adopt life-cycle costing:** Public and private procurement should assess recovery value, avoided imports, environmental safeguards, data security and future industrial capability alongside immediate financial costs.

2. **Expand EPR scope:** EPR should cover a wider basket of critical minerals instead of focusing mainly on high-value metals such as gold and copper.

3. **Differentiate recycling incentives:** EPR pricing should account for difficult waste streams such as lithium ferro phosphate batteries, which otherwise remain economically unattractive to recyclers.

4. **Strengthen traceability:** Linking EPR systems with GST-based verification and requiring chemical-composition disclosure can reduce discrepancies between reported recycling and actual material recovery.

5. **Integrate informal collectors:** Informal collection systems should be integrated into formal material flows, while authorised recyclers and recycling outcomes receive stronger verification.

6. **Improve institutional coordination:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Ministry of Finance need coordination because EPR and GST currently operate in silos.

7. **Build implementation capacity:** Dedicated authorities or specialised desks, institutional continuity, industry engagement and ground-level capacity are needed to convert policy intent into consistent execution.

8. **Create feedback-based governance:** Common EPR systems and feedback loops can help policies evolve with implementation outcomes instead of remaining disconnected from ground realities.

Conclusion

India needs to move from meeting e-waste compliance targets to achieving **effective and efficient material recovery**. Life-cycle costing, wider EPR coverage, stronger traceability, informal-sector integration, better technology and coordinated institutions can improve outcomes. Such an approach can reduce environmental and economic costs while strengthening **domestic supplies, industrial capability and resource security**, ensuring that today's e-waste decisions do not create larger costs tomorrow.

Question for practice:

Discuss the need to consider both immediate financial costs and long-term strategic value while making e-waste management decisions in India.

Source: [The Hindu]; [DownToEarth]

SCO Declaration: Terrorism, Security and Geopolitical Challenges

Introduction

The **26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit** in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, held from **August 31 to September 1**, adopted the **Bishkek Declaration** as the grouping marked its 25th anniversary. The declaration addressed terrorism, cross-border security, West Asian conflicts, sovereignty, international law and global governance, alongside cooperation in energy, climate, disaster management, drugs, artificial intelligence and information security. For India, the summit also advanced priorities in security, connectivity, opportunity and engagement with Central Asia and the wider Eurasian region.

Key Highlights of the Bishkek Declaration

1. **Counter-Terrorism and Cross-Border Movement:** The declaration **condemned terrorism in all forms**, rejected double standards and called for international action against the **cross-border movement of terrorists.**

2. **United Nations' Role in Counter-Terrorism:** Members called for the **United Nations (UN) to play a central role** in countering terrorism through relevant Security Council resolutions and its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.
3. **Sovereignty and Non-Interference:** The declaration reaffirmed **sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs** and rejected attempts to discredit government bodies of member states.
4. **Human Rights and Double Standards:** Members reaffirmed the **universal obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms** and opposed double standards in their application.
5. **Universal Security Threats Centre:** Leaders agreed to establish a **Universal Centre for Countering Security Threats**to strengthen cooperation against terrorism, extremism, organised crime and other transnational threats.
6. **Narcotics and Drug Addiction:** Members agreed to strengthen cooperation against **drug trafficking and synthetic drugs** and adopted a programme on combating drug addiction until **2030**.
7. **Information and Cyber Security:** The declaration called for stronger action against the **terrorist, separatist and extremist use of the internet** and greater cooperation on information security and protection.
8. **Energy and Climate Action:** Members agreed to strengthen cooperation on **energy conservation and efficiency** and adopted a memorandum on combating climate change.
9. **Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance:** The summit adopted a statement on **assistance to countries affected by emergencies** to strengthen cooperation in disaster management and humanitarian assistance.
10. **Artificial Intelligence Cooperation:** SCO members agreed to **expand cooperation in artificial intelligence**, including efforts to promote its responsible and inclusive use.
11. **Information and Media Cooperation:** Members agreed on **information cooperation** to promote institutional exchanges and strengthen engagement in the regional media space.

For detailed information on **SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise** [read this article here]

SCO's Response to West Asian and Global Geopolitical Challenges

1. **Condemnation of Strikes on Iran:** SCO condemned military strikes on **Iran**, noting civilian casualties and economic damage while warning of risks to international peace and stability.

2. **Political Solution for Iran Conflict:** Members supported Iran's **sovereignty and territorial integrity** and called for resolving the conflict only through political and diplomatic means.

3. **West Asian Peace:** SCO supported a **comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question**, treating it as essential for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

4. **Impact of Ongoing Wars:** The conflicts in **Ukraine and West Asia** have created energy and food security problems, global market instability and wider economic pressures.

5. **Commitment to International Law:** Members reaffirmed the **UN Charter and international law** while supporting stronger UN authority in maintaining peace, security and sustainable development.

6. **Multipolar World Order:** SCO supported a **representative, democratic and equitable multipolar world order**, while rejecting bloc-based and confrontational approaches to international disputes.

7. **SCO's Institutional Position:** The grouping clarified that it is **not a military-political bloc** and is not directed against other states or international organisations.

India's Priorities and Gains from the SCO Summit

1. **Regional and Central Asian Engagement:** The summit gives India a platform to advance **security, development and connectivity** while strengthening engagement with Central Asia and the wider Eurasian region.
2. **India's 25-Year Roadmap:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a roadmap for the next **25 years**, with concrete outcomes focused on **security, connectivity and opportunity**.
3. **Youth and Scientific Cooperation:** India's initiatives on the **SCO Young Scientists Forum, youth cooperation and the SCO Young Authors Conference** were included in the summit outcomes.
4. **Civilization Dialogue:** India will host the **first SCO Civilisation Dialogue Forum later in 2026**, providing a platform for civilisational exchanges among member states.
5. **English as SCO Language:** The SCO amended its Charter to include **English as an official and working language** of the organisation.
6. **One Earth, One Family, One Future:** SCO members reaffirmed dialogue based on the idea of **"One Earth, One Family, One Future,"** which India had promoted during its **2023 G20 presidency**.

Challenges for India within the SCO

1. **Pakistan's Cross-Border Terrorism:** The declaration's call against **cross-border terrorism** remains important for India because it has consistently raised concerns over terrorism originating from Pakistan.
2. **Balancing Israel and Iran:** India must manage its **strong ties with Israel** while joining an SCO declaration that condemned military strikes on Iran.
3. **China-Pakistan Dynamics:** India has to pursue its interests within an organisation that includes **both China and Pakistan**, alongside other major regional powers.
4. **Pakistan's SCO Presidency: Pakistan will assume the SCO presidency**, and the next meeting of the Council of Heads of State will be held there in **2027**, making India's participation closely watched.
5. **Independent Foreign Policy:** India has to use the SCO platform for its **security, connectivity, energy and development interests** while maintaining its independent positions on major geopolitical issues.

Conclusion

The Bishkek Declaration strengthens SCO cooperation on **terrorism, security, sovereignty and regional stability** while responding to wider geopolitical and economic challenges. For India, the SCO remains an important platform for **counter-terrorism, Central Asian engagement, connectivity, energy and development**. India must also manage its complex relations with **China, Pakistan, Israel and other members** while pursuing its independent foreign-policy priorities.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the key outcomes of the Bishkek Declaration and their significance for India amid emerging security and geopolitical challenges.

Source: [Indian Express](); [Newsonair]()

India's drug-resistance problem is bigger than antibiotic overuse

Source: The post **"India's drug-resistance problem is bigger than antibiotic overuse"** has been created based on **"India's drug-resistance problem is bigger than antibiotic overuse"** published in "Indian Express" on 03rd September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Science and technology

Context: Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics, making infections more difficult and costly to treat. A recent ICMR study across **20 tertiary-care hospitals**, covering **1,59,336 hospitalised patients between April 2022 and April 2025**, highlights the serious mortality and economic burden of carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative infections.

Why is the situation alarming?

1. **Higher mortality:** Carbapenem-resistant infections were associated with a **16–43% higher relative risk of death** across *E. coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Acinetobacter baumannii* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.
2. **High mortality in bloodstream infections:** Mortality among resistant bloodstream infections ranged from around **39% in resistant E. coli to 51% in resistant A. baumannii**.
3. **High resistance in tertiary hospitals:** More than **61% of Gram-negative infections** in the study were carbapenem-resistant, although this figure should not be treated as representative of the general community because these hospitals largely handle referred and critically ill patients.
4. **Higher treatment costs:** Antibiotic costs for resistant infections were **1.1–2 times higher**, while the actual economic burden is likely to be much greater after including ICU care, diagnostics, procedures, supportive care and hospital charges.

Factors driving AMR beyond antibiotic overuse

1. **Healthcare-associated transmission:** More than **85% of bloodstream infections** in the study were classified as healthcare-associated, highlighting the role of transmission within hospitals.
2. **Gaps in infection prevention:** Inadequate hand hygiene, environmental cleaning and surgical infection prevention can facilitate the spread of resistant organisms.
3. **Invasive medical devices:** Catheters and other invasive devices increase infection risk, particularly when they are not removed at the earliest appropriate opportunity.
4. **Recent surgery and critical illness:** Surgical procedures, severe illness and multiple comorbidities can increase vulnerability to resistant infections.
5. **Delayed diagnosis:** Late recognition of infection delays appropriate treatment and allows patients to deteriorate.
6. **Inadequate or delayed therapy:** Resistance may not be identified quickly enough, leaving clinicians with fewer effective treatment options.
7. **Antibiotic selection pressure:** Excessive or inappropriate antibiotic exposure promotes the emergence and spread of resistant bacteria.

Way forward

1. **Strengthen infection prevention and control:** Hospitals must prioritise hand hygiene, environmental cleaning, device-associated infection prevention, surgical infection prevention and surveillance of healthcare-associated infections.

2. **Improve diagnostics:** Faster and more accurate diagnostics should help distinguish bacterial from non-bacterial illness and identify resistance at an early stage.
3. **Ensure antimicrobial stewardship:** Antibiotics should be used at the **narrowest effective spectrum and for the shortest appropriate duration**, rather than routinely escalating to stronger drugs.
4. **Integrate AMR surveillance:** India should move beyond isolate-based surveillance towards **patient-level surveillance linking laboratory results with treatment and mortality outcomes**.
5. **Ensure responsible access to newer antimicrobials:** Effective newer drugs should remain available for patients who genuinely need them while being protected through appropriate stewardship.
6. **Use evidence cautiously:** Drugs such as **ceftazidime-avibactam** showed beneficial associations in some resistant *E. coli* and *Klebsiella* infections, but observational evidence cannot establish universal superiority. Treatment should therefore be guided by diagnostics and resistance mechanisms.

Conclusion: AMR is not merely an antibiotic-prescribing problem; it is also an infection-prevention, diagnosis, transmission and healthcare-system problem. Antibiotics cannot compensate for failures in infection prevention. Therefore, India needs an integrated strategy combining **prevention, early diagnosis, surveillance, antimicrobial stewardship and responsible access to effective newer treatments**.

Question: Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) cannot be addressed merely by controlling antibiotic overuse. Discuss the factors driving drug-resistant infections in India and suggest an integrated approach to tackle the problem.

Source: [Indian Express]

Can jurists be appointed as Supreme Court judges?

Source: The post **"Can jurists be appointed as Supreme Court judges?**

" has been created based on **"Can jurists be appointed as Supreme Court judges?**

" published in "Indian Express" on 03rd September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: Article 124(3) of the Constitution provides **three routes for qualification as a Supreme Court judge**. Apart from a person who has served as a High Court judge for at least five years or practised as an advocate of a High Court for at least ten years, the President may appoint a person who, in his opinion, is a **"distinguished jurist."** However, this provision has remained unused for more than 76 years.

Reason behind introduction of the provision

1. The **Constituent Assembly deliberately added "distinguished jurist" as a separate category** of persons eligible for appointment to the Supreme Court.
2. The objective was to **widen the field of choice** and bring diversity in professional backgrounds among Supreme Court judges.
3. H.V. Kamath noted that persons with **"outstanding legal and juristic learning"** were not necessarily confined to practising lawyers or judges.
4. The Assembly also referred to the example of **Felix Frankfurter**, a Harvard Law School professor for 25 years, who was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1939 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
5. Frankfurter later became known for the doctrine of **judicial restraint**, illustrating the value of distinguished legal scholars in constitutional adjudication.

Issues with the provision

1. The Constitution **does not define who qualifies as a "distinguished jurist."**
2. It also does not prescribe any **minimum period of professional experience** for such a person.
3. This lack of objective criteria makes the provision open-ended and difficult to operationalise.
4. Nevertheless, its separate inclusion indicates that the framers contemplated a route to the Supreme Court **beyond conventional judicial service and legal practice**, potentially allowing eminent legal scholars and academics to enter the Court.

Reasons why it has remained unused

1. Traditional preference for judges and advocates

a. Supreme Court judges have overwhelmingly been appointed from among **High Court judges**.
b. Only a small number have been **directly elevated from the Bar**.
c. Thus, the established appointment practice has not created space for distinguished jurists.

2. Role of the Supreme Court Collegium

a. A jurist would first have to be **recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium**.
b. The appointment process itself therefore helps explain why the provision has remained unused.
c. The possibility of appointing legal scholar **Upendra Baxi** to the Supreme Court never materialised; he later described the provision as a **"dead issue."**

3. Difficulty in identifying eligible jurists: Since the Constitution does not define "distinguished jurist," there is no clear benchmark for determining who possesses the required distinction.

4. Concerns regarding practical legal experience

a. Legal academics may lack **courtroom and procedural experience**.
b. Under **Rule 49 of the Bar Council of India Rules**, an advocate taking up full-time salaried employment must cease legal practice while such employment continues.
c. Therefore, full-time law teachers may face restrictions on simultaneously practising as advocates.
d. This creates a perceived divide between **"law in books" and "law in action."**

Can a distinguished jurist be appointed as a High Court judge?

1. The Constituent Assembly had also considered allowing distinguished jurists to become **High Court judges**.
2. In 1949, Professor **Shibban Lal Saksena** proposed their inclusion among persons eligible for High Court appointment, but the proposal was not accepted.
3. Nearly three decades later, the **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976**, amended Article 217 and allowed a person who, in the President's opinion, was a "distinguished jurist" to be appointed as a High Court judge.
4. This provision came into force in January 1977 but was subsequently **omitted by the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978**.

Way forward: The concept can be reconsidered if there is a need to bring **greater professional diversity** into the higher judiciary. Clearer criteria for identifying a distinguished jurist, along with consideration of **legal**

scholarship, constitutional expertise and practical understanding of law, could make the provision more workable. The experience of the Constituent Assembly shows that the provision was intended to expand, rather than narrow, the pool of legal talent available to the Supreme Court.

Conclusion: The "distinguished jurist" provision reflects the Constitution-makers' vision of a **diverse and intellectually strong Supreme Court**. Its non-use is primarily linked to the absence of a clear definition, the established preference for judges and advocates, the Collegium-based appointment process, and concerns about practical courtroom experience. Reconsidering these issues could help realise the original constitutional intention behind Article 124(3).

Question: Article 124(3) of the Indian Constitution permits the appointment of a "distinguished jurist" as a Supreme Court judge. Discuss why this provision has remained unused since its inception.

Source: [The Hindu]()

Reducing India's Exposure to U.S. Tariff Risks

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

India faces growing U.S. tariff risks due to its Russian crude purchases, strong export dependence on the U.S., and exposure of key sectors such as pharmaceuticals. Existing and proposed U.S. measures can raise trade costs and affect India's growth. India therefore needs to reduce its vulnerability through **market diversification, domestic reforms and better management of its energy and trade interests**.

U.S. Tariff Measures Affecting India

1. Lindsey O. Graham Bill: The U.S. Senate passed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 by 86–11 votes, increasing economic pressure on Russia.

- **100% Tariff Provision:** The Act authorises tariffs of up to **100% on goods from the five largest importers of Russian crude oil or natural gas**.
- **India's Exposure:** India, the **second-largest buyer of Russian crude after China**, could face these additional tariffs on its exports to the U.S.
- **Implementation:** The proposed 100% tariff is **not automatic**; the bill must become law, after which the U.S. President can decide whether to impose it.
- **Other Measures:** The Act proposes **500% tariffs on Russian goods**, sanctions on Russian officials and financial institutions, and extends the **Iran Sanctions Act until 2031**.

2. Existing Tariff on India: In August 2025, the U.S. imposed an additional 25% tariff on Indian goods over Russian oil purchases, taking tariffs on some Indian exports to 50%.

3. **Section 301 Tariff:** On July 24, 2026, the U.S. imposed an additional 10% tariff on India under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, replacing the expired 10% duty under Section 122.

4. **Generic Medicine Tariffs:** Separately, the U.S. has proposed a 100% tariff on generic medicines from 2028, rising to 200% in 2029 unless firms shift production to America.

Why is India Vulnerable to U.S. Tariffs?

1. **Dependence on Russian Crude:** Russian crude increased from around 2% of India's imports before the Russia-Ukraine conflict to nearly half in 2026, making energy purchases a major point of friction.

2. **Rapid Import Growth:** Russian crude imports almost doubled from 4.54 MMT in January to 8.96 MMT in May 2026, showing the scale of this dependence.

3. **Energy Security Needs:** Russian oil has helped India secure stable supplies and manage crude import costs, making a sudden reduction in purchases difficult.

4. **West Asian Disruptions:** The West Asian conflict disrupted shipping and pushed Indian refiners to rely more heavily on Russian crude as an alternative source.

5. **Concentration in the U.S. Market:** The U.S. is a major destination for Indian exports, leaving Indian producers exposed when American tariff policy changes.

6. **Pharmaceutical Dependence:** Pharmaceuticals account for about 13% of India's exports to the U.S., while the U.S. provides around one-third of sales for most major Indian pharmaceutical companies.

7. **High Exposure of Some Firms:** U.S. sales account for nearly 50% of total sales of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and Zydus Life Sciences, making these companies particularly exposed to changes in U.S. trade measures.

Economic Implications of U.S. Tariff Pressure

1. **Large Welfare Loss:** Under the sanction scenario with a 110% U.S. tariff, India's welfare falls by nearly $47 billion, while GDP and output also decline.

2. **Lower Domestic Demand:** The sanction scenario reduces domestic demand, reflecting weaker economic activity under prolonged tariff pressure.

3. **Fall in Aggregate Exports:** India's aggregate exports decline by 5.1%, as higher tariffs weaken the competitiveness of Indian products.

4. **Fall in Imports:** Aggregate imports decline by 5.2%, reflecting weaker economic activity and disrupted trade flows.

5. **Pressure on India-U.S. Trade Deal:** Continued tariff disputes could increase friction between the two countries and risk progress on the India-U.S. trade deal.

6. **Possible Pharma Production Shift:** U.S. tariff pressure may encourage Indian pharmaceutical firms to expand production in America, raising concerns about diversion of domestic production.

Way Forward

1. **Diversify Export Destinations:** India should expand its presence in alternative markets so that changes in U.S. trade policy have a smaller effect on overall exports.

2. **Use the India-EU FTA:** A functional India-EU FTA can provide an important alternative market and strengthen India's integration with other economies.

3. **Benefits of Diversification:** Under the diversification scenario, welfare improves by $26.3 billion, GDP turns positive, output and domestic demand recover by around 1%, while exports rise 3.1%and imports 2.6%.

4. **Improve Trade Facilitation and Logistics:** Better trade facilitation and logistics can help Indian exporters access alternative markets more efficiently.

5. **Reduce Non-Tariff Barriers:** Removing non-tariff barriers and improving standards can strengthen access to alternative markets and improve export competitiveness.

6. **Move towards Higher-Quality Goods:** India should move up the goods quality ladder to strengthen long-term export competitiveness.

7. **Balance Energy and Trade Interests:** India should protect its energy-security needs while managing the diplomatic and economic costs linked to Russian crude purchases.

Conclusion

India's exposure to U.S. tariffs reflects the interaction of **energy choices, export concentration and sector-specific dependence**. The response should therefore combine wider export markets with domestic reforms and strategic energy management. **A more diversified and competitive trade base** can reduce the impact of future U.S. tariff decisions while strengthening India's resilience to wider geopolitical shocks.

Question for practice:
Examine the challenges posed by rising U.S. tariff risks to India and the measures needed to reduce its exposure.
Source: The Hindu

Why India may revive 'Most-Favoured-Nation' rule in bilateral treaties

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-International relations

Introduction

India is reconsidering its **Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** framework after finding that its restrictive approach has made some treaty negotiations difficult. It may introduce a **Qualified Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN)** provision to address investor concerns and improve investment certainty, especially with major partners such as the European Union (EU), without restoring the broad MFN rule that had raised concerns for India.

Understanding MFN in Investment Treaties

1. **Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs):** BITs are agreements between two countries that establish rules for protecting investments and cover issues such as non-discrimination, expropriation, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), fund transfers and Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).

2. **MFN as a Non-Discrimination Rule:** MFN generally requires investors from one treaty partner to receive treatment no less favourable than that given to investors from another treaty partner.

3. **Treaty-Based Scope of MFN:** An MFN clause may allow investors to claim protections available under another treaty, but its effect depends on the specific wording and scope of the provision.

4. **Difference from WTO MFN:** Investment-treaty MFN concerns **foreign investor treatment**, while the World Trade Organization (WTO) MFN principle **applies to trade relations between member countries.**

5. **Qualified MFN:** Qualified MFN provision keeps the principle of non-discrimination but **places clear limits on its use.** It can specify which treaty **provisions can be claimed, whether claims can apply retrospectively, and whether settled disputes can be reopened.**

Why Did India Remove the MFN Provision?

1. **White Industries Dispute:** In 2011, the White Industries v. India, an Australian investor used MFN in the India-Australia BIT to rely on the "effective means" standard available under India's BIT with Kuwait.

2. **Adverse Award against India:** The investment arbitration tribunal allowed White Industries to rely on the Kuwait treaty protection, and India was ordered to pay about US$4.08 million, plus interest and costs.

3. **Risk of Borrowing Treaty Protections:** The dispute raised concerns that investors could use MFN to borrow substantive and procedural protections from India's other BITs that were not negotiated in their own treaties.

4. **Law Commission's Concern:** The Law Commission of India had identified the risk that investors could use MFN provisions to obtain wider protections from other Indian BITs.

5. **Cautious 2016 Model BIT:** India adopted a more cautious 2016 Model BIT after the White Industries dispute, excluding open-ended MFN and full **Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET)** while narrowing the definition of investment.
6. **Five-Year Domestic Remedy Requirement:** The model required investors to pursue **domestic remedies for five years** before accessing international arbitration, giving greater importance to domestic dispute resolution.

What Happened After the 2016 Model BIT?

1. **Termination of Older Treaties:** India terminated or sought to renegotiate several older investment treaties and moved towards the stricter approach of the Model BIT.

2. **Narrower Investor Protection:** The new approach removed MFN, narrowed the investment definition and replaced broad Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET) protection with more limited safeguards.

3. **Limited Acceptance by Investment Partners:** Only a handful of countries, including Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, Taiwan and Uzbekistan, signed investment treaties with India under the stricter framework.

4. **India-UAE Treaty:** The India-UAE investment treaty, effective from August 2024, reduced the domestic-remedies period from five to three years and widened investment coverage.

5. **India-Israel Agreement:** The India-Israel investment agreement, effective from July 4, 2026, also reduced the domestic-remedies period to three years and included wider financial investments.

6. **MFN Still Excluded:** Despite these changes, the India-UAE and India-Israel agreements retain the exclusion of MFN, showing that India remains cautious about unrestricted MFN.

Why Is India Reconsidering MFN?

1. **Difficult Treaty Negotiations:** Restrictions under the existing framework have made negotiations with some major investment partners more difficult, creating pressure for a more flexible model.

2. **Need to Attract Foreign Investment:** Declining net FDI has increased the need for a more predictable and competitive investment regime that can provide greater certainty to foreign investors.

3. **Declining Net FDI:** Average annual net FDI fell from nearly US$40 billion in FY20-FY22 to around US$7.65 billion in FY26, based on preliminary data.

4. **Changing Investment Approach:** Recent treaties with the UAE and Israel show that India has already relaxed some earlier restrictions, while continuing to exclude MFN.

5. **EU's Evolving Model:** The **European Union (EU)** has moved towards an **Investment Court System** while retaining non-discrimination protections.

6. **Reciprocal Treatment:** Qualified MFN could help India seek **similar treatment for Indian companies** operating in major economies such as the US and EU.

Proposed Reforms to India's BIT Framework

1. **Qualified MFN with Specific Limits:** India may allow MFN only for clearly specified treaty provisions, preventing investors from automatically importing favourable protections from unrelated third-country treaties.

2. **Safeguards against Wider Claims:** The provision could clarify retrospective application, reopening of settled disputes and covered categories of treatment to prevent broad MFN claims.

3. **One-Year ISDS Window:** The domestic-remedies period under Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) could be reduced from five years to one year, allowing unresolved disputes to move towards international arbitration sooner.

4. **Stronger Domestic Dispute Resolution:** The shorter ISDS period would place **greater responsibility on domestic dispute-resolution institutions**, as weak institutions could allow investors to reach international arbitration sooner.
5. **Ten-Year Post-Treaty Protection:** The proposed framework would extend **post-treaty protection for investors from five years to 10 years** after the BIT expires.
6. **Wider Investment Definition:** Treaty protection could cover portfolio investments and other financial assets, including certain shares and minority holdings depending on the final wording.

7. **Ban on Third-Party Funding:** The proposed framework could prohibit third-party funding of investment disputes, adding another safeguard to the dispute-resolution process.

8. **Retention of Key Safeguards:** India would retain the exclusion of **open-ended MFN and full Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET)** protection, so the proposed changes would not restore the earlier broad treaty approach.

Conclusion

India's proposed BIT reforms seek a **middle path** between unrestricted MFN protection and the restrictive approach adopted after the White Industries dispute. A carefully limited MFN clause, faster dispute resolution and wider investment coverage can improve **investor certainty and competitiveness**. At the same time, safeguards can protect India's **regulatory autonomy** and strengthen its position in bilateral investment negotiations.

Question for practice:
Discuss why India may revive a qualified Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) provision in its Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and the key reforms proposed in its investment treaty framework.

Source: Business Standard

An apple, an orange and 2.6 per cent

Source: The post **"An apple, an orange and 2.6 per cent"** has been created based on **"An apple, an orange and 2.6 per cent**" published in **"Business Line" on 4th September 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus:GS-3-Indian Economy

Context: India's Q1 GDP growth for 2026-27 has been officially estimated at **7.8% in real terms** and **10.3% in nominal terms**. However, a competing calculation has claimed that the economy grew by only **2.6%**, which has led to questions about the reliability of official GDP data.

Why the 2.6% figure is misleading

1. The 2.6% calculation compares **₹88.27 lakh crore** of Q1 GDP based on the new **2022-23 base year** with **₹86.05 lakh crore** based on the old **2011-12 base year**.

2. These figures belong to different statistical series and use different methodologies and coverage, so they cannot be directly compared.
3. When comparable figures are used, nominal GDP growth is around **10.3%**, while real GDP growth is around **7.4–7.8%**.
4. The 2.6% figure also confuses **current-price GDP with constant-price GDP**, even though current prices include the effect of inflation.

Need for GDP rebasing

1. GDP needs to be rebased periodically so that it reflects the changing structure and composition of the economy.
2. The **2011-12 base year** had become outdated and did not adequately capture the present structure of the Indian economy.
3. The **IMF's 2025 data adequacy assessment** identified several weaknesses in India's national accounts and graded them **C**.
4. The new GDP series introduced **2022-23 as the base year**, along with **double deflation and a proper Producer Price Index (PPI)**.
5. The rebasing was delayed because **2016-17 was affected by demonetisation, 2017-18 by the GST transition, and the following years by the Covid-19 pandemic**.
6. Therefore, **2022-23 was considered a more suitable and relatively stable base year**.

GDP revisions are a normal practice

1. GDP estimates are regularly revised because better and more comprehensive data become available over time.
2. India's current GDP estimate is provisional and can be revised until the final estimates are released.
3. Between FY22 and FY25, the old GDP series recorded **25 upward revisions and 12 downward revisions**.
4. Similar revisions are undertaken by other major economies such as the **United States, the United Kingdom and Japan**.
5. Therefore, revision of GDP estimates should not by itself be treated as evidence of manipulation.

Other indicators of economic activity

1. **GST collections** till August stood at ₹10.42 lakh crore and increased by **11%**, indicating strong tax activity.
2. **Passenger vehicle sales increased by 25.6%**, while August dispatches increased by **35%**.
3. **Commercial vehicle sales grew by more than 40%**, while tractor sales increased by **19%**.
4. **Cement growth stood at 8.8%**, indicating continued construction and infrastructure activity.
5. **Exports till July increased by 17%**, while net FDI increased from **$4.75 billion to $7.8 billion**.
6. These indicators provide evidence of economic activity that is difficult to reconcile with a growth rate of only **2.6%**.

Balanced view

1. The official **7.8% growth estimate should not be treated as final**, because GDP estimates are subject to future revisions.
2. However, criticism of GDP data should be based on **comparable figures from the same statistical series and methodology**.

3. At the same time, issues such as **weak real wages and the availability of good-quality jobs** remain genuine concerns that require separate attention.

Conclusion: GDP rebasing is essential for producing **more accurate and relevant estimates of economic activity**. Therefore, GDP figures should be assessed using **consistent methodologies, comparable series and appropriate price measures** rather than by mixing figures from different GDP series.

Question: The revision and rebasing of India's GDP estimates have generated debate over the reliability of economic growth data. Discuss the rationale for GDP rebasing and the importance of using comparable data while assessing economic growth.

Source: Business Line

For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home

Source: The post **"For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home"** has been created based on **"For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home**" published in **"The Hindu" on 4th September 2026.**

UPSC Syllabus:GS-3-Indian Economy

Context: India has made significant progress in promoting institutional deliveries, but this has also increased the pressure on neonatal care facilities. Recent incidents of newborn deaths in hospitals, including the **August 2026 fire at a government women's hospital in Amravati**, highlight the need for a systemic approach to neonatal healthcare.

Major challenges in neonatal care

1. **Overcrowding has emerged as a major challenge** because institutional deliveries increased from **39% in 2005-06 to around 90% in 2023-24**.
2. The absolute number of institutional deliveries increased from **109 lakh in 2005 to 194 lakh in 2024-25**, thereby increasing the workload on hospitals.
3. The number of sick newborns admitted to **Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs)** increased from **11.3 lakh in 2021-22 to 14.45 lakh in 2023-24**, which represents a **28% increase in two years**.
4. **Changing case mix** has increased pressure on government hospitals because they now handle not only normal deliveries but also high-risk cases involving premature, low-birth-weight and sick newborns referred from peripheral facilities.
5. **Infrastructure failures** can have serious consequences because neonatal units depend heavily on uninterrupted oxygen, electricity and specialised equipment.
6. Past incidents such as the **Gorakhpur oxygen crisis of 2017** and fires at hospitals in **Bhandara, Bhopal, Jhansi and Amravati** demonstrate the risks associated with inadequate safety infrastructure.
7. **Staffing and infection-control deficiencies** are also major concerns because overcrowding, poor nurse-to-baby ratios, equipment shortages and weak infection-prevention practices can increase hospital-acquired infections.
8. Newborn-care units also face the problem of **high electrical loads** because equipment such as warmers, incubators and ventilators operate continuously.

Lessons from the Gadchiroli model

1. The **Gadchiroli field trial**, conducted by the Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH), demonstrated that trained community health workers can provide effective **home-based neonatal care**.
2. The intervention resulted in a **62.2% reduction in neonatal mortality** in the rural study area.
3. Community health workers were trained to identify and manage **neonatal infections, promote breastfeeding and warmth, and care for low-birth-weight and premature babies**.
4. Later evidence from Gadchiroli showed that **97% of low-birth-weight and preterm babies**, including those with birth weights above 1,800 grams and gestational ages above 34 weeks, could be safely managed at home with very low case-fatality rates.
5. This model shows that **not every newborn requiring care needs to occupy a hospital bed**, provided that appropriate home-based care and referral systems are available.

Way forward

1. India should adopt a **three-part strategy combining decongested neonatal units, strengthened home-based care and safer hospital infrastructure**.
2. **ASHAs should be adequately trained, supervised and supported** to provide home-based newborn care using modules developed from the Gadchiroli experience.
3. India already has around **8 lakh ASHAs**, which provides a large community-level workforce for strengthening home-based neonatal care.
4. **Stable newborns should receive appropriate care at home wherever possible**, while newborns requiring intensive treatment should be referred to specialised facilities.
5. **Neonatal care units should be strengthened** by ensuring adequate doctors and nurses, appropriate nurse-to-baby ratios, functioning equipment and reliable oxygen and electricity with backup systems.
6. **Infection-prevention measures must be strengthened** to reduce hospital-acquired infections in overcrowded neonatal units.
7. Neonatal units should be made **intrinsically safe** through fire-detection and suppression systems, electrical and oxygen-system safety measures, emergency evacuation drills and independent safety audits.
8. The success of the **Janani Suraksha Yojana** in promoting institutional delivery should be complemented by a stronger focus on what happens **after mothers reach healthcare facilities**.
9. The healthcare system should recognise that **every mother needs access to institutional delivery, but not every newborn necessarily needs hospitalisation**.

Conclusion: India's neonatal strategy should move beyond simply increasing institutional deliveries towards ensuring **the right care at the right place and at the right time**. A combination of **safe and decongested neonatal units, trained community-based care and robust referral systems** can reduce overcrowding and improve newborn survival.

Question: Despite the expansion of institutional deliveries in India, overcrowding and infrastructure gaps are putting pressure on newborn care facilities. Discuss the major challenges in neonatal healthcare and suggest a suitable strategy for improving newborn survival.

Source: The Hindu

The Gap in Manufacturing Sector GVA

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3 - Indian economy

Introduction

India's new National Accounts Statistics (NAS), with 2022-23 as the base year, estimates manufacturing GVA at ₹38.6 lakh crore in 2023-24. However, an alternative estimate using Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) gives only ₹27.4 lakh crore, creating a 40.9% gap and raising questions about the official estimate.

How is Manufacturing GVA Estimated?

1. **Two parts of manufacturing:** Manufacturing includes the **organised factory sector** and **unincorporated or informal units**, such as small factories, workshops and household enterprises.
2. **Factory-sector data through ASI:** The **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)** provides production, employment and value-added data for registered manufacturing factories.
3. **Informal-sector data through ASUSE:** The **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE)** covers manufacturing units outside the corporate and factory sectors.
4. **Combined coverage of ASI and ASUSE:** Together, ASI and ASUSE capture almost the entire manufacturing sector, making their combined gross value addition(GVA) useful for checking official estimates.
5. **MCA-21 as a major source:** The NAS uses **MCA-21 company balance-sheet data** to estimate organised manufacturing GVA, replacing part of ASI-based estimation since the previous revision.
6. **Changes in the 2022-23 base-year revision:** The **2022-23 base-year series released in 2026** retains MCA-21, but fine-tunes the method through **segregation of activities in multi-activity companies** and uses ASUSE instead of earlier five-yearly NSS surveys.
7. **Changes in price estimation:** The new series uses **double deflation where suitable**, replacing single deflation to improve the measurement of manufacturing GVA at constant prices.

The Scale and Source of the GVA Gap

1. **Official manufacturing GVA:** The new NAS estimates manufacturing GVA at ₹**38.6 lakh crore in 2023-24 at current prices**, equal to about **14% of aggregate GVA**.
2. **Alternative estimate:** The ASI and ASUSE datasets together produce an alternative estimate of ₹**27.4 lakh crore**, which is ₹**11.2 lakh crore or 40.9% below** the official figure.
3. **Gap cannot be treated as minor:** Such a large difference between estimates based on official datasets cannot be explained simply by small **definitional or methodological variations**.
4. **Informal sector is not the main source:** ASUSE is common to both estimates, while the unincorporated sector accounts for only **13.9% of total manufacturing GVA**.

5. **Organised sector creates the main difference:** The major source of the gap therefore lies in **organised manufacturing**, where the NAS relies on MCA-21 company financial data.

6. **Enterprise approach behind the shift:** The **2011-12 base-year revision** introduced the MCA-21-based enterprise approach to capture activities of manufacturing companies beyond individual factory establishments.

7. **Continuation in the new series:** The **2022-23 base-year revision of 2026** continues this MCA-21-based approach with limited methodological changes, making its treatment central to the present GVA debate.

Can Residual Workers and Companies Explain the Gap?

1. **Employment-based validation:** Potential manufacturing output can be estimated from employment by applying **technical ratios** derived from ASI and ASUSE data.

2. **PLFS employment estimate:** The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24** estimates **697.5 lakh manufacturing workers**, compared with **532.9 lakh workers** represented in ASI and ASUSE.

3. **Residual workers:** PLFS estimates **697.5 lakh workers**, while ASI and ASUSE account for **532.9 lakh**, leaving **164.6 lakh residual workers,** may therefore explain part of the GVA gap.

4. **Employment data are not identical:** PLFS, ASI and ASUSE use different employment definitions and collection methods, but PLFS still provides a useful reference for checking the official GVA.

5. **Residual MCA-21 companies:** MCA-21 has **3,51,152 active private non-financial manufacturing companies**, while ASI covers **78,618 private companies**, leaving **2,72,534 residual companies** outside ASI coverage.

6. **Uncertain operational status:** A **2019 NSSO Technical Report** found that **36% of MCA-21 companies** in a services-sector exercise were closed, untraceable, unwilling to provide information or misclassified.

7. **Estimated working residual companies:** Since **36% of the 2,72,534 residual companies** may be non-working, the remaining **64%**, which is equal to **1,74,422 companies**, are considered potentially working.

8. **GVA of residual companies:** The **technical ratios for private non-factory companies**, derived from **unit-level ASI data**, are applied to the **1,74,422 potentially working residual companies**, giving **15.6 lakh workers and ₹1.9 lakh crore GVA**.
9. **GVA of remaining workers:** The remaining **149.1 lakh residual workers** are considered part of the **unincorporated manufacturing sector**; applying the **GVA-per-worker ratio derived from ASUSE data** gives ₹**1.7 lakh crore GVA.**
10. **Total residual contribution:** The ₹1.9 lakh crore GVA from residual companies and ₹1.7 lakh crore from the residual unincorporated sector together give ₹3.6 lakh crore.

11. **Potential manufacturing GVA:** Adding ₹3.6 lakh crore of potential GVA to the ₹27.4 lakh crore alternative estimategives ₹31.0 lakh crore.

The Unexplained Gap: Methodological Concerns

1. **Large gap still remains:** After adding ₹**3.6 lakh crore** to the ₹**27.4 lakh crore alternative estimate**, potential GVA reaches ₹**31.0 lakh crore**, which is ₹**7.6 lakh crore below the official** ₹**38.6 lakh crore estimate; this difference is 24.5% of the potential GVA.**

2. **Unexplained GVA:** The potential GVA of ₹**31.0 lakh crore** accounts for **80.3% of the official** ₹**38.6 lakh crore GVA**, leaving ₹**7.6 lakh crore, or 19.7%, unexplained**.

3. **NSO's explanation:** The NSO argues that ASI may miss value addition occurring outside factories, such as **head-office, R&D, marketing and distribution activities**, which MCA-21 may capture.

4. **Evidence challenges the ASI explanation:** Field-based evidence suggests ASI already captures **employment, investment and value addition** from activities outside factory premises when they belong to the enterprise.

5. **Possible MCA scaling-up problem:** Another explanation is that MCA-21 sample estimates may be **scaled up to an uncertain universe of active companies**, whose actual size and composition are unclear.

Way Forward

1. **Open MCA-21 data:** The **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA-21) data** used for manufacturing GVA estimation should be made available for independent examination.

2. **Disclose estimation methods:** The **NSO should provide detailed methods** used to convert MCA-21 company data into manufacturing GVA estimates.

3. **Enable independent validation:** Researchers should be able to compare **MCA-21, ASI, ASUSE and PLFS data** to verify the official manufacturing GVA estimate.

4. **Resolve the methodological dispute:** Independent scrutiny can establish whether the higher MCA-21-based estimate reflects **better production coverage or possible overestimation.**

5. **Restore confidence in official data:** Greater transparency and independent verification can strengthen **public confidence in GDP and sectoral GVA estimates**.

Conclusion

The new **2022-23 base-year series** gives manufacturing GVA of ₹**38.6 lakh crore**, but the ASI-ASUSE estimate gives only ₹**27.4 lakh crore**. Even after accounting for residual companies and workers, ₹**7.6 lakh crore remains unexplained**. The key issue is whether MCA-21 improves coverage or causes overestimation. **Opening data and methods for independent verification** is therefore essential to establish the estimate's credibility.

Question for practice:

Examine the reliability of India's manufacturing sector GVA estimates and the reasons behind the gap between official and alternative estimates.

Source: The Hindu

Why India Needs Transition to Thorium-Based Fuel?

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

Introduction

India faces a **rising energy demand and limited domestic uranium resources**, while possessing abundant thorium reserves. This creates a strong case for shifting towards thorium-based fuel to improve **long-term energy security, reduce dependence on imported uranium and strengthen fuel self-reliance.** India's three-stage nuclear programme provides the basic pathway, but faster development of breeder reactors, fuel recycling and advanced reactors is needed to make large-scale thorium use possible.

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme: The Pathway to Thorium

1. **Resource-based nuclear strategy:** Dr Homi Bhabha designed the three-stage programme around India's **limited uranium and abundant thorium**, aiming for long-term energy and fuel security.

2. **Three-stage nuclear programme framework:** India follows a sequential nuclear strategy that begins with uranium-based pressurised heavy water reactors, moves to fast breeder reactors, and finally transitions to thorium-based power using uranium-233.

3. **Stage I—PHWRs:** Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) use **natural uranium** to generate electricity, while part of uranium-238 is converted into plutonium-239.

4. **Stage II—Fast Breeder Reactors:** Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) use plutonium from PHWRs and help generate additional fissile material while creating the conditions for thorium utilisation.

5. **Stage III—Thorium utilisation:** Thorium-232 is converted into **fissile uranium-233**, which can then serve as fuel in advanced reactors.

6. **Sequential fuel progression:** Each stage creates the fuel or capability needed for the next, making **FBR development important for India's eventual thorium transition.**

For detailed information on **Thorium-Based Nuclear Energy for India's Energy Security** read this article here

Why India Needs Thorium for Long-Term Energy Security

1. **Limited domestic uranium availability:** India has relatively modest uranium resources, which restrict the scope of a conventional uranium-based nuclear programme over the long term.

2. **Growing energy requirements:** India's rapidly increasing energy needs over the next **15–25 years** require a nuclear fuel strategy that can support sustained capacity expansion.

3. **Emerging uranium supply pressure:** Global uranium resources could support about **550–750 GW** through a once-through cycle, creating concerns as global nuclear capacity expands.
4. **Rising global nuclear capacity:** Global nuclear capacity could reach **1,446 GW by 2050**, exceeding the roughly **1,200 Gigawatts-electric (GWe)** target under the Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy.
5. **Limited fuel utilisation:** A once-through uranium cycle limits the energy obtained from available resources, while recycling can increase uranium's energy potential by **70–100 times**.
6. **Reduced import dependence:** Greater use of domestic thorium can reduce India's dependence on imported uranium and protect nuclear generation from external supply pressures.
7. **Strategic fuel self-reliance:** A successful thorium cycle can provide a **domestic source of nuclear fuel**, supporting India's long-term objective of energy and technological self-reliance.

India's Thorium Advantage and Progress Towards Its Utilisation

1. **Large domestic thorium resource:** India has around **1.07 million tonnes of thorium deposits**, representing nearly **one-quarter of global thorium resources**.
2. **Monazite as the main source:** Indian thorium occurs mainly in **monazite**, a phosphate mineral found with rare earth elements, uranium and other minerals.
3. **Coastal concentration of resources:** Major monazite-bearing deposits occur along the coasts of **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha**, with additional occurrences in Maharashtra and Gujarat.
4. **Established PHWR capability:** India has developed indigenous capabilities in **PHWR construction, fuel fabrication, operation, spent-fuel reprocessing and waste management**, creating a strong base for thorium integration.
5. **PFBR milestone:** The **500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam achieved first criticality in April 2026**, marking India's transition into the second stage.
6. **Opportunity within PHWRs:** With PHWR capacity expected to reach **50–60 GW**, thorium can potentially be introduced earlier instead of waiting entirely for the third stage.
7. **Advanced Heavy Water Reactor:** The **Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR)** has been developed to use thorium-based fuel and demonstrate the technical and commercial viability of the thorium fuel cycle.

Challenges in Accelerating the Thorium Transition

1. **Thorium is not directly fissile:** Thorium-232 cannot sustain a nuclear chain reaction by itself and must first be converted into **fissile uranium-233**.
2. **Dependence on breeder reactors:** Commercial-scale U-233 production depends on the successful operation and expansion of **Fast Breeder Reactors**, linking the second and third stages.

3. **Higher neutron absorption:** Thorium absorbs more neutrons than uranium, creating technical and economic concerns when introducing thorium-based fuel into existing PHWRs.

4. **Need to control electricity costs:** Thorium should be irradiated in PHWRs without increasing the **cost of electricity**, otherwise early adoption may become commercially difficult.

5. **Need to maintain uranium consumption:** Any PHWR-based thorium strategy should avoid increasing uranium requirements while maintaining the existing level of uranium consumption.

6. **Fuel-cycle technology gaps:** Large-scale deployment requires **high-burn-up fuel, higher-enrichment uranium, thorium fuel fabrication and advanced thorium recycling technologies**.

7. **Complex fuel recycling:** India needs thorium-heavy-fuel recycling capabilities to recover useful materials and move towards a more effective closed thorium cycle.

8. **Technology development timeline:** Thorium-heavy-fuel recycling and **molten-salt reactor technologies** need development over the next **10–15 years** to bring forward the third stage.

Way Forward

1. **Introduce thorium in PHWRs:** India can explore early thorium use in its expanding PHWR fleet, provided it does not raise electricity costs or uranium consumption.

2. **Expand breeder reactor capacity:** Faster development of FBRs can increase the production of **uranium-233**, which remains essential for large-scale thorium utilisation.

3. **Develop high-burn-up fuels:** India needs better fuel technologies that can withstand higher levels of fuel utilisation and support efficient thorium-based reactor operation.

4. **Strengthen thorium recycling:** Developing thorium-heavy-fuel recycling technology can help recover useful nuclear materials and improve the energy obtained from domestic resources.

5. **Advance AHWR technology:** Continued development of the **Advanced Heavy Water Reactor** can help demonstrate whether thorium-based power generation is technically and commercially viable.

6. **Develop molten-salt reactors:** Research on thorium-based molten-salt reactors should progress over the next **10–15 years** to provide another route towards the third stage.

7. **Follow a dual-track strategy:** India should continue expanding uranium-based nuclear generation while simultaneously developing the technologies needed for future thorium deployment.

Conclusion

India's transition to thorium is essential for achieving long-term energy security and nuclear fuel self-reliance. Limited uranium resources and growing energy demand make a stronger case for using India's abundant thorium reserves. The three-stage nuclear programme provides a clear pathway, but faster progress in FBRs, U-233 production, fuel recycling and advanced reactors is needed. A gradual and technology-driven transition can strengthen India's nuclear future while reducing dependence on imported fuel.

Question for practice:

Discuss why India needs to transition towards thorium-based nuclear fuel for long-term energy security and self-reliance.
Source: Indian Express

The SCO and the illusion of moral multipolarity

Source: The post **"The SCO and the illusion of moral multipolarity"** has been created based on **"The SCO and the illusion of moral multipolarity"** published in "**The Pioneer**" on 05th September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2- International Relations

Context: The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** is evolving from a regional security forum into a broader institutional network covering **finance, technology, energy, connectivity, artificial intelligence, information security, and trade**. Its growing importance reflects the **decline of uncontested Western primacy** and the emergence of multiple centres of global power.

SCO and the Emerging Multipolar World

1. The SCO originated from the **Shanghai Five in 1996**, which included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.
2. The organisation was formally established in **2001**, when Uzbekistan joined the grouping.
3. **India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017, Iran joined in 2023, and Belarus joined in 2024**, significantly expanding its geographical and political importance.
4. The SCO should not simply be viewed as an **anti-Western military alliance**, because its members have diverse interests and it officially rejects bloc confrontation.
5. The organisation is increasingly becoming an **institutional network** covering counterterrorism, narcotics, information security, artificial intelligence, computing infrastructure, ports, logistics, energy, climate, biodiversity, nuclear security, emergency assistance, and cultural cooperation.

China's Growing Economic Influence

1. China has converted its economic strength into **structural influence** through trade, infrastructure financing, industrial investment, telecommunications, transport corridors, energy, and technology.
2. Chinese involvement in Central Asia is increasingly moving beyond consumer goods and infrastructure towards **productive sectors**, such as the fertiliser plant being developed in Kyrgyzstan's Osh region.
3. Such investments can create **industrial capacity, reduce import dependence, and promote regional connectivity**, but they can also deepen the economic integration of smaller countries with China.
4. China has become an **extraordinary export power**, with competitive manufacturing in machinery, electronics, electric vehicles, batteries, renewable-energy equipment, and industrial products.
5. Developing countries often purchase Chinese goods because they provide **affordability and availability**, and such trade cannot automatically be described as exploitation.
6. However, China's trade with Central Asia is heavily tilted towards **Chinese exports**, with Chinese customs data showing trade with the five Central Asian republics exceeding **$100 billion in 2025** and Chinese exports substantially exceeding imports.

7. Differences between Chinese and Central Asian trade statistics also create difficulties in assessing whether commercial relationships are genuinely equitable.
8. China's large global trade surplus reflects an important **economic imbalance**, because the corresponding deficits are borne collectively by other countries.

Limits of the Multipolarity Argument

1. **Multipolarity only describes the distribution of power and does not automatically determine how power is exercised.**
2. Western military intervention, sanctions, financial coercion, and double standards can legitimately be criticised, but such criticism cannot provide **Beijing, Moscow, or any other power with freedom from scrutiny**.
3. If Western countries are criticised for using economic and financial asymmetries against weaker states, the same moral standard should be applied to **China's use of its industrial capacity and market power**.
4. Therefore, opposition to Western dominance should not automatically be equated with **greater justice, equality, or moral legitimacy**.

SCO's Financial and Institutional Challenges

1. The proposed **SCO Development Bank** demonstrates the gap between political declarations and institutional reality.
2. The Bishkek summit did not establish an operational bank, while questions regarding **capital, membership, governance, and headquarters** remain unresolved.
3. An alternative financial system cannot be created merely through declarations about **de-dollarisation**, because it requires capital, liquidity, credible governance, settlement mechanisms, investor confidence, and durable institutions.
4. Alternative payment mechanisms such as **China's CIPS and Russia's SPFS** can reduce dependence on Western financial infrastructure in certain transactions.
5. However, these systems have not displaced the **global importance of the US dollar** or reproduced the depth and liquidity of dollar-centred financial markets.
6. Therefore, the SCO's economic credibility will ultimately depend on **what its institutions can actually finance rather than what its communiqués promise**.

Contradictions within the SCO

1. The SCO emphasises **sovereignty and non-interference**, while simultaneously engaging with the political future of Afghanistan.
2. It speaks of **equality**, although its members have enormous differences in economic and military capabilities.
3. It opposes double standards but its members themselves often interpret **terrorism, sovereignty, and international law according to their national interests**.
4. The treatment of **Ukraine and Iran** demonstrates the difficulty of developing a common SCO position because its members have different strategic interests.
5. The strong language concerning military strikes on Iran, alongside the absence of a similar reference to Ukraine, highlights these differences.
6. These differences do not necessarily prove hypocrisy; rather, they show that the SCO remains a **coalition of interests rather than a unified geopolitical ideology**.

Way Forward

1. The SCO should focus on building **credible and transparent institutions** rather than limiting itself to political declarations.
2. Its economic initiatives should ensure **greater transparency in trade, investment, debt, and project financing** so that smaller member states can negotiate equitable relationships.
3. The organisation should promote **genuine economic diversification and capacity-building** rather than creating excessive dependence on any single major power.
4. Its financial initiatives should be supported by **credible governance, adequate capital, transparent decision-making, and effective payment mechanisms.**
5. The SCO should apply **consistent standards of sovereignty, international law, equality, and accountability** to all major powers, including its own members.

Conclusion: The rise of the SCO reflects the **transition towards a more multipolar international order**, but multipolarity should not be confused with moral superiority. The West must be held accountable for its exercise of power, but **China, Russia, India, and other emerging powers must also be judged by the same standards of accountability and equality**. Thus, the real success of the SCO will depend not on its opposition to Western dominance but on whether it can create **effective, equitable, transparent, and durable institutions** that genuinely benefit its members.

Question: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is emerging as an important institution in the evolving multipolar world order. However, multipolarity does not necessarily ensure greater equality or justice. Discuss.

Source: The Pioneer

Women's empowerment — schools and beyond

Source: The post **"Women's empowerment — schools and beyond"** has been created based on **"Women's empowerment — schools and beyond"** published in "Business Line" on 05th September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2- Governance

Context: The **NFHS-6 (2023-24) Fact Sheets** show that India has made significant progress in women's education and empowerment, while substantial **inter-State and gender disparities** continue to exist. Women's empowerment includes access to **quality education, economic opportunities, decision-making, livelihoods, healthcare, and effective women's collectives**.

Progress in Women's Empowerment

1. Rural livelihood mission collectives have expanded to around **100 million women**, creating greater opportunities for credit, livelihoods and collective action.
2. Women's collectives have improved access to **credit, employment, nano-enterprises, livestock resources, farm and non-farm livelihoods**, and reproductive and child healthcare.
3. Measures such as **cash transfers, clean water, sanitation and free travel in some States** have also improved women's lives and strengthened their participation in development.

4. Women's collectives have contributed to greater participation of **adolescent girls in secondary education** and improved access to livelihood opportunities.

Inter-State Differences in Girls' Education

1. The proportion of females aged six years and above who had ever attended school increased to **73.7 per cent in 2023-24**, indicating considerable progress.
2. **Kerala** performs particularly well, with **96.6 per cent** of females aged six years and above having ever attended school.
3. However, **Bihar and Rajasthan** continue to face historical disadvantages, with only around **64 per cent** of females having ever attended school.
4. **Telangana**, despite having a relatively high per capita income, reports only **60.2 per cent**, showing that economic prosperity alone does not guarantee gender empowerment.

Gender Gap in Schooling

1. The data on people aged **15-49 years with ten or more years of schooling** also reveals significant gender disparities.
2. **Kerala** performs particularly well, with 86.6 per cent of females having ten or more years of schooling compared with 82.1 per cent of males.
3. **Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat** have less than 40 per cent of their population in this age group achieving ten or more years of schooling.
4. **Telangana** has a gender gap of around **13.9 percentage points**, indicating the need for stronger efforts to improve girls' education.
5. **Haryana**, despite its high per capita income, has a gender gap of around **9.2 percentage points**, demonstrating that income does not automatically translate into social development.
6. These variations show that **gender inequality can remain a major obstacle to development and well-being even in economically prosperous States**.

Women's Empowerment and Child Development

1. Gender inequalities also have a strong relationship with **stunting among children below five years of age**.
2. The better-performing States generally have stunting levels below the national average of **29.3 per cent**, whereas the aspiring States generally remain above the national average.
3. States such as **Haryana, Telangana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka** show relatively concerning stunting outcomes despite their economic performance.
4. Reducing the gender gap in **ten years of schooling** can contribute to improving child nutrition and reducing stunting over time.
5. Women's education, empowerment, voice, agency and collective action can produce **long-term improvements in household and child well-being**.

Role of Women's Collectives and Local Governance

1. **States such as Sikkim, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar** have made significant progress in reducing child stunting through collaborative governance involving women's collectives.
2. The **Panchayati Raj Institutions–Self-Help Group (PRI-SHG) framework** has helped promote a more gender-sensitive approach to development.

3. Women's collectives provide women with greater **voice, bargaining power, access to resources and opportunities for collective decision-making**.
4. Decentralisation and community participation can therefore strengthen the implementation of development programmes at the grassroots level.

Importance of Pre-School Education

1. Less than **50 per cent of children aged 2-4 years** are covered by pre-school education, showing that universal early childhood education remains a challenge.
2. The better-performing States generally have higher pre-school coverage, highlighting the importance of **early childhood education in holistic child development**.
3. The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** rightly emphasises pre-school education as an important component of the education system.
4. Expanding quality pre-school education can improve **human capital, learning outcomes and long-term development**.

Role of Women Care Workers

1. **ASHAs, Anganwadi workers and helpers** play a critical role in delivering health, nutrition, childcare and other essential services at the grassroots level.
2. However, their **low compensation and inadequate support** can affect the quality of childcare and other last-mile services.
3. Better compensation and stronger institutional support for these locally resident women workers are necessary to provide **quality day-care centres and crèches**.
4. Adequate childcare facilities are particularly important for enabling **women's participation in the labour force**.
5. Investment in quality childcare can simultaneously improve **human capital, female labour force participation, productivity and economic growth**.

Challenges

1. **Patriarchal attitudes** continue to restrict women's opportunities and decision-making power despite improvements in several indicators.
2. Significant **regional and inter-State disparities** continue to exist in girls' education, schooling years, nutrition and access to early childhood services.
3. High per capita income does not always result in **commensurate social development**, as demonstrated by the performance of some economically prosperous States.
4. Gaps in pre-school coverage and inadequate compensation for frontline women **workers continue to weaken the delivery of essential social services.**

Way Forward

1. Governments should prioritise **universal and quality education for girls**, particularly in States and regions with historically low educational attainment.
2. The **PRI-SHG model** should be strengthened to promote decentralised and community-driven development.
3. Women's collectives should be provided with better access to **credit, markets, skills, technology and diversified livelihoods**.

4. Greater investment should be made in **early childhood care, nutrition, pre-school education, day-care centres and crèches**.
5. ASHAs, Anganwadi workers and other frontline women workers should receive **adequate compensation, training and institutional support**.
6. Policies should focus not only on women's welfare but also on strengthening their **voice, agency, economic independence and participation in decision-making**.

Conclusion: The NFHS-6 findings demonstrate that **women's empowerment is not merely a matter of social justice but a prerequisite for inclusive growth and human development**. Women's education, collective action, economic participation, voice and agency can reduce gender gaps and improve **child nutrition, health, productivity and overall well-being**. Therefore, India needs a development approach that combines **girls' education, women's collectives, decentralised governance, quality childcare and economic opportunities** to achieve truly inclusive and sustainable development.

Question: Women's education, empowerment, voice, agency and collective action are essential for achieving inclusive development in India. Discuss in the light of the NFHS-6 findings.

Source: [Business Line]

Revising India's Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Indian economy

Introduction

India is reviewing its **Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** to make the investment regime more attractive while protecting its regulatory space. The review follows difficulties in concluding new BITs, concerns over investor protection and declining net foreign direct investment (FDI). The revised framework is expected to be placed before the **Union Cabinet**, with consultations currently underway.

What is India's BIT Framework?

1. **Purpose of BITs:** BITs are agreements between two countries that establish rules for protecting investments and defining the rights of foreign investors.

2. **Core protections:** BITs cover **non-discrimination, expropriation, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), fund transfers and Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**.

3. **2015 Model BIT:** India adopted the **2015 Model BIT** after reviewing its investment treaty policy following disputes raised by foreign investors.

4. **Shift in treaty policy:** The review resulted in **unilateral termination of BITs** and adoption of a new model as the basis for future treaty negotiations.

5. **Regulatory objective:** India's model seeks to protect its **right to regulate**, including through exclusions and safeguards in sensitive policy areas.

Limitations of India's Existing BIT Framework

1. **Regulatory imbalance:** The 2015 Model BIT places greater weight on the **State's right to regulate**, creating doubts about legal protection available to foreign investors.
2. **Limited treaty adoption:** India concluded only a **handful of BITs** under the stricter framework, including agreements with **Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, Taiwan and Uzbekistan**, showing limited acceptance by investment partners.
3. **Investment uncertainty:** High regulatory risks, less-developed governance models and a **slow judicial system** increase concerns about the investment environment.
4. **Restricted arbitration access:** Foreign investors must exhaust **domestic legal remedies for five years** before seeking international arbitration for treaty disputes.

Why is India Reconsidering Its BIT Framework?

1. **Need for a competitive regime:** India wants a more **predictable and competitive investment framework** that can provide greater certainty to foreign investors.
2. **Declining net FDI:** Average annual net FDI fell from nearly **US$40 billion in FY20-FY22 to around US$7.65 billion in FY26**; India received $7.7 billion in the year ended March 2026, against $20.2 billion for Vietnam and $24.2 billion for Indonesia in 2024.
3. **Recent treaty experience:** BITs with **Israel and the UAE** show greater flexibility in some areas, including dispute-resolution arrangements and investment coverage, while retaining important safeguards.
4. **Changing purpose of BITs:** Indian companies are increasingly investing abroad, making investment treaties relevant not only for **inbound foreign investment but also for protecting Indian investors overseas.**
5. **International developments:** The **European Union (EU)** has moved towards an Investment Court System while retaining non-discrimination protections, showing changes in global investment-treaty practice.

Proposed Reforms to India's BIT Framework

1. **Qualified MFN:** India may introduce a **qualified MFN clause** that applies only to clearly specified treaty provisions instead of allowing investors to import protections broadly from other treaties.
2. **MFN safeguards:** The provision could define its treatment of **retrospective claims, settled disputes and covered categories**, reducing the scope for wider MFN-based claims.
3. **Shorter ISDS period:** The domestic-remedies requirement could be reduced from **five years to one year**, allowing unresolved disputes to move towards international arbitration sooner.
4. **Longer post-treaty protection:** Protection after a BIT expires could increase from **five years to 10 years**, extending treaty protection for covered investments.

5. **Wider investment coverage:** The revised framework could include **portfolio investments and other financial assets**, including certain shares and minority holdings, depending on the final wording.

6. **Ban on third-party funding:** Third-party funding of investment disputes could be prohibited to provide an additional safeguard in the dispute-resolution process.

7. **Retained safeguards:** India would continue excluding **open-ended MFN and full FET protection**, so the proposed changes would not restore the earlier broad treaty approach.

Way Forward

1. **Strike a balanced approach:** Bring the framework closer to the middle ground between **investor protection and the State's regulatory autonomy**.

2. **Strengthen domestic dispute resolution:** A shorter domestic-remedies period makes efficient domestic institutions even more important.

3. **Create an external expert group:** Include experts in international investment law and foreign investment, such as **international lawyers and economists from universities, research institutions and think tanks**, to act as a sounding board for the government.

4. **Ensure wider stakeholder consultation:** Seek views from **industry bodies, arbitrators, law firms and civil society organisations**.

5. **Release the draft for public consultation:** Place the revised Model BIT in the **public domain and invite comments**, as India did with the draft Model BIT in March 2015.

6. **Ensure parliamentary scrutiny:** Place the draft before **Parliament for discussion** and involve relevant **department-related parliamentary committees**.

7. **Address the democratic deficit:** Since investment treaties can affect citizens, greater public and parliamentary participation can improve democratic legitimacy.

8. **Make consultation meaningful:** The process should not become a mere **box-ticking exercise**; it should genuinely engage with different and dissenting views.

Conclusion

India's revised BIT framework should balance **investor protection with the State's regulatory autonomy**. A carefully limited MFN clause, faster dispute resolution and wider investment coverage can improve investor certainty and competitiveness. Strong safeguards can preserve policy space. Meaningful consultation and parliamentary scrutiny can further strengthen the framework's credibility, transparency and effectiveness.

Question for practice:

Discuss the need for revising India's Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) framework and the key reforms proposed for balancing investor protection with the State's regulatory autonomy.
Source: [The Hindu]

Gaming Children – Learnings from Meta's Child Safety Curbs in US

Introduction

The growing use of social media among children has raised concerns about **addictive design, harmful content, mental wellbeing and privacy**. Meta's settlement in the US introduces strong safeguards for under-18 users, including time limits, night-time restrictions and stronger age assurance. For India, the measures offer useful lessons, but they also show the need for an **India-specific child-safety framework** based on evidence, privacy and safety by design.

Growing Concerns over Social Media Use among Children

1. **Addictive platform design: Autoplay, endless scrolling, notifications and personalised recommendations** can maximise engagement and turn casual social-media use into compulsive behaviour.
2. **Vulnerability of children:** Children's developing capacity for **self-regulation** can make them more vulnerable to digital products designed to capture and hold attention.
3. **Impact on daily life:** Serious compulsive use can cause children to **miss school, withdraw from family and friends, lose interest in normal activities and struggle to regulate digital use**.
4. **Displacement of healthy activities:** Excessive device use can reduce time for **play, reading, creative activity, physical movement, face-to-face interaction and downtime** needed for healthy development.
5. **Developmental concerns:** Digital overuse can make difficulties with **attention, frustration tolerance, impulse control, organisation and emotional regulation** more visible in clinical assessments.
6. **Mental-health risks:** Heavier social-media use has been linked with **anxiety, depressive symptoms, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating**; a 2026 meta-analysis of 45 studies involving over 33,000 adolescents found significant associations.
7. **Neuroscience findings:** Reviews have found associations between problematic internet or gaming use and changes in **frontal, attention, emotion-regulation and reward-related brain regions**, though these findings do not prove social media alone causes such changes.
8. **Exposure to harmful content:** Children can encounter **self-harm material, eating-disorder content, exploitation, misogyny, violent imagery and other age-inappropriate content**, which recommendation systems may repeatedly promote.

Meta's New Child-Safety Measures in the US

1. **Two-hour daily limit:** Meta's US settlement requires a **default two-hour daily limit** for under-18 users on Facebook and Instagram to limit excessive use.
2. **Night-time access block:** Teen users will face a **midnight-to-6 a.m. access block**, restricting social-media use during night hours.

3. **School-hour notification control:** Notifications will be muted between **8 a.m. and 3 p.m.**, limiting interruptions during school hours.
4. **Stronger age assurance:** Meta will strengthen its technology to identify users aged **13–17 even when they provide an adult birthday**, making age-based safeguards harder to bypass.
5. **Safer feed and engagement controls:** Teenagers can choose a **non-algorithmic feed, turn off autoplay and hide like counts by default**, reducing engagement-driven and social-comparison pressures.
6. **Parental and contact controls:** Meta will strengthen **parental controls and restrictions on unwanted contact from adults**, giving parents greater control over teenagers' online experiences.
7. **Independent oversight:** Meta will establish an **independent research foundation and an auditor** to assess the impact of its measures and compliance.

What the Meta Settlement Signals for Children's Online Safety

1. **Shift from parental responsibility:** The settlement moves away from treating parents as the **sole responsibility holders** and places greater responsibility on platforms themselves.

2. **Platform accountability:** Technology companies are expected to address risks created by their own **engagement-driven products, recommendation systems and platform features**, rather than relying only on parental supervision.

3. **Safety by design:** Child protection is moving towards changing the **architecture and default settings of platforms**, instead of expecting children to control systems designed to maximise engagement.

4. **Broader than screen-time control:** The measures cover **recommendations, autoplay, notifications, social comparison, unwanted contact and age assurance**, showing that child safety involves more than limiting hours.

5. **Technical feasibility:** Meta's agreement demonstrates that stronger **child-safety features can be built into major social-media platforms**.

6. **Limits of time-based safeguards:** Time limits may not fully address harm if platforms continue using **addictive design and recommendation systems** that encourage compulsive engagement.

7. **Shared responsibility:** Child safety requires coordinated action by **governments, schools and technology companies**, including digital literacy, transparency and age-appropriate platform design.

India's Emerging Child-Safety Challenges

1. **Privacy-focused DPDP framework:** India's **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) framework** requires verifiable parental consent for processing children's personal data and restricts targeted advertising, behavioural monitoring and profiling.

2. **Gap in product-level safety:** The DPDP framework does not specifically regulate **social-media addiction, mental wellbeing or screen time**, which are central concerns addressed by Meta's US settlement.

3. **Child sexual abuse material:** India also faces the serious challenge of **child sexual abuse material (CSAM)**, with government scrutiny of platforms' content moderation and detection systems alongside IT Rules requirements.

4. **Age assurance dilemma:** Platforms need to establish whether a user is a child for applying safeguards, but **age verification itself can require personal information** and may create additional privacy concerns.

5. **Limits of self-declaration:** WhatsApp is testing a **voluntary age-declaration mechanism in India**, but simply asking users to provide their birth date does not necessarily establish their actual age.

6. **Different Indian context:** US measures cannot be copied directly because India has **different schooling practices and high shared-device usage among teenagers**, requiring locally suitable safety measures.

7. **Need for evidence:** India should first collect **its own evidence and data on online harms to children** before prescribing detailed product-level restrictions.

Key Lessons for India

1. **Build an Indian evidence base:** The Centre should commission an **independent study** covering screen time, addictive design, algorithmic recommendations, harmful content, online harassment and social comparison.

2. **Adopt wellbeing by design:** India should develop a principles-based **"wellbeing by design" framework** suited to Indian patterns of online use.

3. **Use safer defaults:** Platforms should consider **teen-safe defaults, stronger privacy protections, tighter messaging controls and restrictions on features such as autoplay**.

4. **Improve algorithmic accountability:** Regulators should examine **how recommendation systems and algorithms affect children**, especially their exposure to harmful and engagement-driven content.

5. **Strengthen independent scrutiny:** Platforms should provide greater transparency on **content-review systems and algorithmic data use**, along with independent audits and researcher access.

6. **Protect children without over-collecting data:** Age assurance should identify children for applying safeguards while avoiding **unnecessary collection of their personal information.**

7. **Make safeguards enforceable:** Where evidence shows that platform features cause **demonstrable harm to children**, appropriate accountability and enforceable regulation should follow.

8. **Move beyond voluntary compliance:** India should move from **warnings, meetings and consultations towards effective regulation**, especially where voluntary safeguards fail to protect children.

Conclusion

Meta's US settlement shows that **children's online safety cannot rest only on parental supervision**. India should learn from its focus on platform responsibility, safer design and stronger safeguards, while adapting them to Indian conditions. An **evidence-based and enforceable framework** should protect children's privacy, development and mental wellbeing without blocking their legitimate access to education, health, emergency services and the wider internet.

Question for practice:

Examine the concerns related to children's social media use and the key lessons India can learn from Meta's child-safety measures in the US.
Source: [Businessline]; [Indian Express]; [ndtv]

The political cost of unconditional cash transfers

Source: The post **"The political cost of unconditional cash transfers"** has been created based on **"The political cost of UCT"** published in "The Hindu" on 07th September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 2- Governance

Context: Since 2020, **Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) schemes** have become an important electoral strategy in several Indian states, particularly for attracting women voters. Schemes such as **Gruha Lakshmi in Karnataka, Rythu Bandhu in Telangana, Lakshmi Bhandar in West Bengal and Magalir Urimai Thogai in Tamil Nadu** provide direct financial assistance to beneficiaries.

Significance of UCT Schemes

1. UCT Schemes Strengthen Social Protection

a. UCT schemes provide **direct and immediate financial assistance** to economically vulnerable households.
b. They can improve household consumption and provide greater financial security to families facing economic difficulties.
c. Direct transfers can reduce dependence on intermediaries and make welfare delivery more accessible.

2. UCT Schemes Promote Women's Economic Agency

a. Many UCT schemes specifically target women, increasing their control over household financial resources.
b. Such transfers recognise women's contribution to **unpaid domestic and care work**.
c. They can strengthen women's economic agency and contribute to **gender equality and SDG 5**.

3. UCT Schemes Have Strong Electoral Appeal

a. The direct and visible nature of cash transfers makes them attractive to voters.
b. Political parties increasingly use targeted welfare schemes to connect directly with specific voter groups, particularly women.
c. However, their increasing use in electoral politics creates concerns about balancing welfare objectives with political incentives.

4. UCT Schemes Can Complement Long-Term Development

a. Cash transfers provide immediate financial support to vulnerable households.
b. They can be complemented with investments in **education, healthcare, skills and employment**.
c. Linking short-term income support with human-capital development can generate more durable welfare gains.

Challenges

1. Fiscal Sustainability Needs to Be Protected

a. Large and recurring cash transfers can impose significant pressure on state finances.
b. Substantial expenditure on UCTs can reduce fiscal space for **productive investments, infrastructure and employment generation**.
c. Governments therefore need to balance immediate welfare support with long-term developmental expenditure.

2. Beneficiary Identification Needs Greater Accuracy

a. Errors in beneficiary identification can exclude deserving households while including ineligible beneficiaries.
b. Such targeting errors reduce the effectiveness and credibility of welfare schemes.
c. Transparent eligibility criteria and reliable beneficiary databases are therefore essential.

3. Political Costs of Targeting Errors Need to Be Minimized

a. Denial of benefits to eligible households can create dissatisfaction among beneficiaries.
b. The experience of the **Gruha Lakshmi scheme in Karnataka** illustrates how eligibility and exclusion-related concerns can become politically contentious.
c. Effective implementation is therefore as important as the announcement of welfare schemes.

4. Productive Expenditure Needs to Be Protected

a. Excessive allocation towards recurring cash transfers may reduce resources available for **infrastructure, productive investments and employment opportunities**.
b. This can create a tension between providing immediate financial assistance and building long-term economic capacity.
c. Welfare expenditure should therefore support, rather than crowd out, developmental investment.

5. Long-Term Welfare Outcomes Need Greater Attention

a. Cash transfers can provide immediate relief but may not by themselves improve **education, healthcare, skills and employment**.
b. Over-reliance on transfers can weaken the focus on building human capital and productive capabilities.
c. Welfare programmes should therefore be assessed on their broader developmental outcomes.

Way Forward

1. Fiscally Sustainable Welfare Planning Should Be Adopted

a. Governments should assess the **long-term fiscal implications** before introducing or expanding UCT schemes.
b. Welfare expenditure should be balanced with investments in infrastructure, employment and productive sectors.
c. This can ensure that welfare remains financially sustainable.

2. Transparent and Accurate Targeting Should Be Strengthened

a. Beneficiary databases should be regularly updated to minimise inclusion and exclusion errors.
b. Clear eligibility criteria and transparent selection procedures should be adopted.
c. Effective **grievance-redress mechanisms** should be provided to protect genuine beneficiaries.

3. Welfare Should Be Linked with Human Capital Development

a. Cash transfers should be complemented by greater investment in **education, healthcare and skill development**.
b. Employment opportunities should be expanded so that households can gradually move from welfare dependence towards economic independence.
c. This would convert short-term financial assistance into long-term developmental gains.

4. Outcome-Based Evaluation Should Be Institutionalised

a. Schemes should be periodically evaluated using measurable indicators such as **women's empowerment, household welfare, health, education and employment**.
b. Programmes with limited developmental outcomes should be redesigned.
c. Evidence-based evaluation can improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare spending.

5. Welfare Policy Should Be Kept Beyond Electoral Cycles

a. Welfare decisions should be guided by **social needs, evidence and fiscal capacity**.
b. The design and expansion of schemes should not be driven solely by short-term electoral considerations.
c. A predictable and transparent welfare framework can strengthen public trust and social protection.

Conclusion: UCT schemes can serve as important instruments of **social protection, women's empowerment and inclusive welfare**. Their long-term effectiveness, however, depends on **fiscal sustainability, accurate targeting, transparent implementation and measurable developmental outcomes**. India needs a balanced welfare approach in which **cash transfers provide immediate support while investments in human capital, infrastructure and employment create long-term opportunities**, making welfare an instrument of **social justice and sustainable development**.

Question: Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) schemes have emerged as an important tool of welfare delivery as well as electoral politics in India. Discuss their significance, challenges and the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu]

In a warming world, reframe the climate challenge

Source: The post **"In a warming world, reframe the climate challenge"** has been created based on **"In a warming world, reframe the climate challenge"** published in "Indian Express" on 07th September 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS 3- Environment

Context: The latest **UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report, Limiting Overshoot**, warns that global temperature rise cannot now be contained within the **1.5°C threshold** of the Paris Climate Pact. The report calls for making the period of warming above 1.5°C **"as small and short as possible"**, while strengthening resilience and ensuring climate justice.

Key Concerns

A. **1.5°C threshold is increasingly difficult to achieve**
   a. Global temperatures have breached the 1.5°C level more than once in the past five years.
   b. These temporary breaches indicate that the planet is approaching the long-term warming limit that the Paris Agreement sought to avoid.

B. **Increasing frequency of climate disasters**
   a. Heat waves in **Europe, America and Australia** and floods across parts of Asia demonstrate the growing intensity of climate impacts.
   b. The **Nepal flash flood** highlights how vulnerable communities are facing severe consequences in an increasingly unpredictable climate.

C. **Risk of irreversible tipping points**
   a. Every additional fraction of a degree increases the possibility of irreversible climate tipping points.
   b. Retreating glaciers and rising seas make it particularly difficult for vulnerable communities to build resilience.

D. **Climate overshoot may become unavoidable**
   a. UNEP's best-case scenario projects warming peaking at around **1.8°C**.
   b. However, 1.8°C should **not be treated as a new target**, but as a warning about the consequences that even strong climate action may have to confront.

E. **Net-zero alone cannot immediately solve the problem**
   a. Existing net-zero commitments cannot immediately neutralise the carbon already accumulated in the atmosphere.
   b. Climate action will therefore require both **emission reduction and carbon removal**.

F. **Need for carbon removal**
   a. Traditional methods such as increasing **carbon sinks through forests** need to be combined with emerging technologies capable of removing carbon from the atmosphere.
   b. However, the focus must remain on limiting emissions while using carbon removal to address accumulated greenhouse gases.

Ensuring Fair and Equitable Financing for Climate Damage

1. Unequal responsibility and unequal impact

a. Countries and communities that have contributed little to global warming often suffer disproportionately from climate disasters.

b. Nepal's tragedy illustrates this injustice, as the country faces enormous reconstruction costs despite having **little culpability for climate change**.

2. Loss and Damage mechanism

a. The **UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund**, created in 2022, was intended to support countries facing climate-induced losses.
b. However, the estimated cost of rebuilding Nepal is several times larger than the Fund's corpus.

3. Institutional inadequacy

a. The Fund's limited resources reveal the gap between the scale of climate-related losses and available international finance.
b. Its board has also not yet responded to the plea by several countries for an **emergency meeting**, highlighting the need for faster institutional action.

Way Forward

1. The global response must shift from focusing only on **preventing warming** to simultaneously managing the unavoidable impacts of climate change.
2. Climate institutions should develop **rapid-response mechanisms** for climate-induced disasters.
3. The Loss and Damage Fund needs adequate resources and faster decision-making.
4. Climate finance should follow the principle of **climate justice**, with greater responsibility placed on countries historically responsible for higher emissions.
5. Countries must continue ambitious mitigation efforts so that the **overshoot above 1.5°C is as small and brief as possible**.
6. Forests and other natural carbon sinks should be strengthened alongside responsible deployment of **carbon-removal technologies**.
7. Greater attention must be given to building the resilience of communities affected by **retreating glaciers, rising seas, floods and extreme heat**.

Conclusion: The climate challenge can no longer be viewed only as a race to remain below **1.5°C**; it is also a challenge of **managing climate risks and protecting vulnerable populations**. A warming world therefore needs institutions that are **rapid, adequately financed and guided by climate justice**, while continuing every possible effort to minimise the scale and duration of climate overshoot.

Question: The world is entering a phase of unavoidable climate overshoot beyond the 1.5°C Paris threshold. In this context, discuss the need to reframe the global climate response around climate resilience, prompt institutions and climate justice.

Source: [Indian express]

Judicial Integrity – A Case the Court Cannot Ignore

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2-Judiciary

Introduction

Judicial integrity is essential for **public trust, rule of law and judicial independence**. The concerns surrounding the Rajasthan High Court show that allegations against judges cannot be treated only as individual disputes. They raise wider questions about **institutional accountability, transparency, judicial administration and the ability of the higher judiciary to examine its own conduct**.

Serious Concerns over Judicial Administration

1. **Allegations against the Acting Chief Justice:** Justice Sandeep Mehta reportedly sought Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma's immediate transfer through three letters dated **August 2, 10 and 17**, raising specific concerns about his functioning.

2. **Alleged misuse of judicial administration:** The complaints reportedly involved victimisation of judges, improper shifting of cases, favouritism towards selected lawyers and misuse of the **master-of-roster** power.

3. **Concerns over appointments:** Justice Sharma was also accused of nepotism in appointments to the **Permanent Lok Adalat**, raising questions about fairness in administrative decisions.

4. **Pressure on fellow judges:** He was allegedly accused of intimidating colleagues through possible transfers and using his claimed proximity to the CJI as a source of influence.

5. **Prolonged acting arrangement:** Rajasthan High Court functioned under an Acting Chief Justice for about **11 months**, raising concerns about institutional stability and normal judicial administration.

6. **Developments after the allegations:** Lawyers held a sit-in protest, Justice Sharma stopped hearing cases, and Justice Sanjay Agrawal was subsequently appointed as the regular Chief Justice.

The CJI's Institutional Responsibility in Judicial Misconduct

1. **Unusual institutional warning:** A **sitting Supreme Court judge** directly alerted the CJI about the functioning of a High Court Acting Chief Justice, reportedly supported by specific and verifiable material.

2. **Need for timely response:** Although allegations cannot automatically be treated as findings, credible material requires prompt examination through available institutional mechanisms.

3. **Retirement made urgency greater:** Justice Sharma was due to retire on **September 26**, making timely institutional action more important to prevent further damage to the judiciary's credibility.

4. **Earlier action against Justice Ramaswami:** During the 1990 inquiry against Justice V. Ramaswami, CJI Sabyasachi Mukharji advised him to take leave, while CJI Venkatachaliah later stopped allocating cases to him.

5. **Administrative response to Justice Varma:** After burnt currency notes were reportedly found at Justice Yashwant Varma's residence, CJI Sanjiv Khanna transferred him to Allahabad High Court without practically assigning judicial work.

6. **Responsibility of the CJI:** The Supreme Court's reported decision in *XXX v Union of India* (2025) also recognised the CJI's responsibility regarding **judicial integrity and allegations of corrupt practices**.

Structural Gaps in Judicial Accountability

1. **Opaque judicial appointments:** The absence of clear selection criteria and the Collegium–Executive relationship can make appointments **opaque, arbitrary and difficult to assess for merit and integrity**.
2. **Weak statutory mechanism:** The **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** is considered inadequate, while the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2012 lapsed after the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.
3. **Barriers to criminal investigation:** In *K. Veeraswami v Union of India* (1991), the Supreme Court made CJI permission a precondition for registering an FIR against a higher-court judge.
4. **Impeachment has practical limits:** Constitutional removal under **Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b)** has not provided an effective and workable response to judicial misconduct.
5. **Limits of in-house accountability:** The Supreme Court's **1999 in-house mechanism** was created to address complaints of judicial misconduct, but it has not proved sufficiently effective or free from institutional limitations.
6. **Lack of reliable information:** The judiciary has not developed sufficient **data and systematic records on corruption allegations**, making it difficult to understand their extent and nature or design effective reforms.
7. **Self-censorship weakens scrutiny:** Fear of contempt and institutional pressure can discourage media investigations, academic research and public discussion of corruption within the judiciary.

Balancing Judicial Independence with Accountability

1. **Independence cannot mean immunity:** Judicial independence protects courts from external interference, but it should not prevent legitimate scrutiny of misconduct or administrative decisions.
2. **Transparency strengthens public trust:** Proactive disclosure of judicial information can reduce arbitrariness and improve **trust, legitimacy, efficiency and institutional independence**.
3. **Key areas need openness:** Appointments, transfers, case allocation, disciplinary action and judicial recusal require greater transparency because they directly affect perceptions of fairness.
4. **Open courts need accessible information:** Detailed cause lists, published judgments and orders, accessible hearings and media access help the public examine whether judicial proceedings remain fair and impartial.
5. **Academic freedom supports accountability:** The NCERT controversy showed the risks of restricting academic discussion of judicial corruption, particularly when such discussion is treated as harmful without sufficient evidence.

6. **Risk of invisibilising corruption:** Limited research, data, political discussion and media coverage can create an **"economy of ignorance"**, making corruption within the judiciary difficult to understand and address.

Way Forward

1. **Transparent judicial appointments:** Clear and measurable criteria are needed to assess judicial candidates for **merit, integrity and professional suitability**.
2. **Explore alternative appointment models:** India could consider **application-based selection, as in Canada, or an independent judicial selection body, as in the UK**, to improve transparency and merit in appointments.
3. **Effective accountability mechanism:** India needs a credible mechanism to examine serious allegations against higher-court judges while protecting them from political or external interference.
4. **Timely institutional action:** The CJI and other competent authorities should respond promptly to credible allegations by using available administrative powers to prevent further institutional damage.
5. **Judicial Transparency Index:** The **Judicial Transparency Index (JTI)** can measure proactive disclosure by courts on judicial processes, institutional governance, administration, and judicial and administrative personnel.
6. **Improve data and research:** Systematic collection of data and greater academic research on judicial corruption can help establish its extent and identify suitable institutional reforms.
7. **Protect legitimate academic inquiry:** Research and discussion on judicial corruption should remain possible when based on evidence, so that concerns within powerful institutions do not remain hidden.
8. **Use expert assessment for specialised issues:** Academic and curriculum-related questions should be examined by **independent expert bodies** rather than decided solely through judicial review, protecting both academic freedom and institutional credibility.
9. **Protect the judiciary's wider reputation:** Action against individual misconduct should not lead to generalisation, as many judges continue to maintain high standards of integrity and public trust.

Conclusion

Judicial independence must be supported by **transparency, accountability and timely institutional action**. The Rajasthan episode shows the need for stronger mechanisms to address credible allegations against judges. Greater transparency, better public access to judicial information and space for responsible academic research can strengthen public trust. **Protecting judicial independence should not mean avoiding legitimate accountability.**

Question for practice:

Examine the concerns surrounding judicial integrity in India and suggest measures to strengthen judicial accountability and transparency while preserving judicial independence.
Source: The Hindu

Harnessing BRICS 'POWER' to Empower the World

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

BRICS has evolved from an emerging-economy platform into a wider Global South forum with growing economic and political weight. Its 20th anniversary comes amid geopolitical conflicts, trade disruptions, energy insecurity and pressure on multilateral institutions. India's 2026 presidency therefore seeks to use BRICS cooperation to build a more **resilient, innovative, cooperative and sustainable global order**.

For detailed information on **BRICS – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise** [read this article here]

BRICS and India's 2026 Presidency: Setting the Context

1. **BRICS as a Global South platform:** BRICS has emerged as an important force for **world peace, development and cooperation among emerging economies**, with a growing role in global affairs.
2. **India's 2026 presidency:** India is holding the **BRICS rotating presidency in 2026**, with the **18th BRICS Summit scheduled in New Delhi on 12–13 September 2026**.
3. **Geopolitical context:** Rising **geopolitical conflicts, economic disruptions, energy insecurity and supply-chain pressures** have increased the need for stronger cooperation among BRICS members.
4. **India's presidency theme:** India has adopted **"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability"**to guide BRICS cooperation during a period of global uncertainty.
5. **Global South priorities:** BRICS aims to strengthen the **voice and interests of developing countries** while promoting greater cooperation in a changing multipolar world.

Harnessing BRICS "POWER": Five Pillars for Global Cooperation

1. P – Principle:

- **International norms:** BRICS should uphold the **UN Charter, sovereign equality, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes** amid rising geopolitical tensions.
- **Peaceful global order:** BRICS should resist **hegemonism and power politics** and support international relations based on established principles rather than domination.

2. O – Openness:

- **Multilateral trade:** BRICS should protect the **WTO-centred multilateral trading system**, including **most-favoured-nation treatment**, while resisting protectionism and tariff barriers.
- **Open supply chains:** Cooperation in **energy, minerals, infrastructure and industrial supply chains** can support an open and stable global economy.

3. **W – Win-Win:**

- **Development-centred cooperation:** BRICS should keep **development at the centre** and accelerate implementation of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.
- **Economic and financial cooperation:** Greater **macroeconomic coordination, trade facilitation, local-currency payments and cross-border payments** can strengthen mutual economic benefits.
- **Food and energy security:** BRICS should develop **resilient and sustainable agriculture and food systems** to address global food and energy challenges.

4. **E – Engine:**

- **Economic potential:** BRICS accounts for **nearly half of global population, around 30% of global economic output and one-fifth of global trade**, giving it major growth potential.
- **New growth areas:** Cooperation in the **digital economy, smart manufacturing and new industrialisation** can use members' economic and technological strengths.
- **AI cooperation:** Integrating **AI with science, health, agriculture and education** can create new sources of growth and development.

5. R – Responsibility:

- **Global responsibility:** BRICS should promote **peace, development, fairness and justice** while strengthening unity and cooperation among developing countries.

- **India-China coordination:** With **India and China holding successive BRICS presidencies**, sound coordination can support the steady progress of greater BRICS cooperation.
- **Bilateral cooperation:** Resumption of **five direct flight routes** and reopening of **border trade after six years** provide a positive basis for stronger India-China engagement.

Challenges Before an Expanded BRICS

1. **Strategic differences:** India stresses **strategic autonomy and multilateral reform**, while China and Russia can view an expanded BRICS more strongly as a counterweight to Western influence.
2. **India-China trade imbalance:** Despite support for open trade, India faces a **large structural trade deficit with China**, alongside market-access barriers affecting sectors such as pharmaceuticals and agriculture.
3. **Unresolved border tensions:** Improvements in bilateral engagement remain vulnerable to **unresolved LAC issues and trans-border river concerns**, limiting the depth of India-China cooperation.
4. **Financial integration limits:** Local-currency settlement faces practical constraints from **different capital controls, currency convertibility and financial-market structures** across members.
5. **BRICS+ cohesion: BRICS+ cohesion:** Expansion beyond the original five members to countries across **Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia** has increased diversity in foreign-policy and economic priorities, complicating consensus.
6. **Implementation challenge:** BRICS must convert its growing economic and political weight into **practical cooperation rather than broad commitments alone**.

Way Forward

1. **India-China coordination:** India and China should use the **2026 New Delhi and 2027 Beijing summits** to advance a common Global South development agenda while maintaining stable border management.
2. **Independent payment infrastructure:** BRICS should strengthen the **New Development Bank** and develop interoperable cross-border payment systems connecting national payment platforms and digital currencies.
3. **Responsible technology governance:** Members should create **transparent and human-centric AI frameworks** that support innovation while reducing technological concentration and the digital divide.
4. **Critical supply-chain diversification:** BRICS should develop reciprocal supply partnerships in **renewable energy, fertilisers and critical minerals** to reduce vulnerability to external export restrictions.
5. **Economic cooperation:** Members should deepen **local-currency settlement, trade facilitation and investment cooperation** while maintaining the WTO-based multilateral trading system.
6. **Global institutional reform:** BRICS should coordinate efforts to make institutions such as the **IMF, World Bank and UN Security Council** more representative of developing economies.
7. **Issue-based cooperation:** Given internal diversity, BRICS should focus on **areas of shared interest** instead of waiting for complete agreement on every geopolitical issue.
8. **From declarations to delivery:** The grouping should strengthen existing institutions and ensure that BRICS initiatives produce **measurable economic, technological and developmental outcomes**.

Conclusion

The real strength of BRICS lies in converting its economic weight, diverse membership and Global South representation into practical cooperation. By combining Principle, Openness, Win-Win development, economic Engine and Responsibility, BRICS can strengthen multilateralism and contribute to a more inclusive, resilient and representative global order.

Question for practice:

Discuss how BRICS can harness its "POWER" to strengthen global cooperation and empower the Global South.
Source: **The Hindu**