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For UPSC CSE mains examination



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Features :

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Most complete coverage of major
News Papers editorials

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India's new CAFE-III fuel-efficiency norms - Impact on carmakers, small cars and EVs

Source: The post "India's new CAFE-III fuel-efficiency norms - Impact on carmakers, small cars and EVs" has been created based on "India's new CAFE-III fuel-efficiency norms - Impact on carmakers, small cars and EVs" published in "Indian Express" on 1st October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

News: India's CAFE-III norms, effective from April 2027, will assess carmakers on the efficiency of their overall vehicle fleet rather than individual models, with the biggest compliance benefit going to EVs.

About Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE)-III framework

1. **CAFE stands for Corporate Average Fuel Economy**, and CAFE-III refers to India's third set of fuel-efficiency standards for passenger vehicles.
2. It **requires automobile manufacturers** to maintain the average fuel efficiency of their eligible passenger vehicles within a prescribed limit.
3. It **assesses the overall fleet of a manufacturer rather than applying the same fuel-efficiency target** to every individual car model.
4. **The norms will apply from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032** and will cover M1-category passenger vehicles manufactured or imported for sale in India.

Key features

1. **Fleet-level compliance:** Carmakers will be assessed on the **average efficiency of their entire eligible passenger-vehicle fleet**, rather than requiring every individual model to meet the same standard.
2. **Weight-based formula:** The permitted fuel consumption will depend on the **weighted average unladen weight** of a manufacturer's fleet. The reference weight has been fixed at **1,229 kg**.
3. **Progressively stricter norms:** The standards will become more stringent during the five-year period, encouraging continuous improvement in fuel efficiency and CO₂ reduction.
4. **No separate small-car concession:** The final rules have removed the proposed additional **3 g/km benefit for petrol cars weighing up to 909 kg**. However, vehicle weight continues to influence the overall fleet target.
5. **Strong incentive for EVs:** Battery-electric vehicles and range-extended electric vehicles receive a **volume derogation factor of 3**, meaning one such vehicle effectively counts as three vehicles for fleet-level compliance calculations.
6. **Support for multiple powertrains:** Different technologies receive different benefits, including **2.5 for certain plug-in/strong hybrids, 1.6 for strong hybrids and 1.1 for flex-fuel vehicles**.
7. **Alternative-fuel pathway:** The framework recognises renewable and low-carbon fuels such as **ethanol-blended petrol, biofuels and CBG** through a **Carbon Neutrality Factor (CNF)**.
8. **Credit-based compliance:** Manufacturers performing better than their target can earn **credits**, while those performing below the target accumulate debits. Credits can be carried forward within a compliance block and traded between manufacturers.
9. **Technology incentives:** Efficiency-enhancing technologies such as **start-stop systems, tyre-pressure monitoring, regenerative braking, efficient transmissions, LED lighting and improved air-conditioning systems** can qualify for efficiency benefits, subject to an overall cap.

10. **Greater scope for innovation:** The framework provides manufacturers with multiple routes—**vehicle efficiency, electrification, hybrids and cleaner fuels**—to improve fleet-level CAFE performance.

Implications

1. **For carmakers:** The norms will require greater investment in **R&D, efficient technologies and cleaner powertrains**, while providing a clearer long-term compliance framework.
2. **For small cars:** Although the separate proposed concession has been removed, their lighter weight continues to affect the fleet-level calculation.
3. **For EVs:** EVs receive the **largest powertrain-specific compliance benefit**, creating a strong incentive for electrification.
4. **For consumers and the environment:** Greater fuel efficiency and cleaner technologies can contribute to **lower fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions**, while encouraging technological innovation.

Conclusion: CAFE-III marks an important step towards making India's automobile sector more fuel-efficient and environmentally sustainable. By combining stricter fleet-level standards with incentives for EVs, hybrids, cleaner fuels and technological innovation, the framework seeks to balance India's energy-security and climate objectives with the evolving needs of the automobile industry.

Question: What are the key features of India's new CAFE-III fuel-efficiency norms? Examine their implications for carmakers, small cars and electric vehicles.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India can no longer overlook its pasture lands

Source: The post "India can no longer overlook its pasture lands" has been created based on "India can no longer overlook its pasture lands" published in "Business Line" on 1st October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Environment

Context: Rangelands and permanent pastures are important common resources that support livestock production, rural livelihoods, biodiversity and ecological resilience. Despite their importance, **India does not yet have a dedicated national framework for rangelands and grasslands**, and their management remains fragmented.

About Rangelands

1. Rangelands are **areas where natural or semi-natural vegetation** provides forage for grazing and browsing animals.
2. They **extend beyond open grasslands** and include grasslands, shrublands, savannahs, steppes, deserts, mountain pastures, open woodlands and certain wetlands.
3. Rangelands are **primarily dominated by grasses and other herbaceous vegetation**.
4. It **supports both livestock and wild herbivores and performs important ecological functions** such as protecting soil, regulating water cycles, storing carbon and providing habitats for diverse species.

5. They also **convert natural vegetation from areas unsuitable for intensive cultivation into valuable products and livelihoods**, including milk, meat, wool, fibre, manure and income.

Significance of Rangelands

1. In India, rangelands are **spread across diverse geographical regions**, including the alpine pastures of the Himalayas, the cold-arid grazing grounds of Ladakh, and the grasslands and common lands of western India.
 - a. They also **include desert vegetation, forest grazing landscapes and open grazing areas of the Deccan Plateau**, reflecting the wide ecological diversity of India's rangelands.
2. **Significance of Rangelands:** In India, the importance of rangelands and grasslands is clearly visible in the seasonal movement of pastoral communities.
 - a. **Every spring, as the winter snow melts in the Himalayas**, pastoral families move with their livestock towards higher-altitude pastures.
 - b. They **return to lower areas** before winter makes the mountain routes inaccessible.
 - c. Similar **seasonal movements of pastoral communities and livestock** occur across India's deserts, forests, plateaus and semi-arid regions.

Importance of Rangelands

1. **Rangelands support livestock production:** According to ICAR's *Comprehensive Assessment of Feed and Fodder Resources*, India has about **11.5 million hectares of rangelands and permanent pastures**, producing around **28 million tonnes of forage annually**.
2. **They support rural livelihoods:** For millions of **livestock-owning households**, **common grazing lands** provide fodder, reduce feed costs and support livestock-based livelihoods.
3. **They provide economic benefits:** **Grazing commons provide an important form of in-kind income**, even though their economic value is often not reflected in conventional accounting.
4. **They support biodiversity:** **Healthy rangelands provide habitats for biodiversity** and contribute to the maintenance of ecological systems.
5. **They improve drought resilience:** Well-managed rangelands **strengthen the ability of communities and livestock systems** to withstand drought and environmental stress.
6. **They protect soil and water resources:** Healthy rangelands help protect soil, support water regulation and contribute to **groundwater recharge**.
7. **They contribute to carbon storage:** Rangelands also provide ecosystem services through **carbon storage and reduced land degradation**.

Major Challenges

1. **Rangelands are undervalued:** Their benefits are often invisible because grazing on common lands does not usually involve direct monetary transactions.
2. **The 'wasteland' perception is a major problem:** Rangelands are often viewed as marginal or unproductive lands, encouraging their conversion for agriculture, infrastructure and other uses.
3. **Degradation increases household costs:** When rangelands deteriorate, livestock owners face higher feed expenses, lower livestock productivity, smaller herds and greater dependence on purchased fodder.
4. **Policy management is fragmented:** Rangeland management is spread across different sectors, programmes and jurisdictions, making it difficult to assign responsibility and resolve competing claims.

5. **India lacks a dedicated national framework:** The absence of a specific national policy for rangelands and grasslands has contributed to their continued marginalisation.

Way Forward

1. **India should develop a National Rangeland/Grassland Policy** with clearly defined institutional responsibilities at different levels of government.
2. **A National Rangeland Atlas should be developed** to systematically map the extent, condition and productivity of rangelands and grazing commons.
3. **Degraded rangelands should be restored** through scientifically sound and locally adapted management practices.
4. **Existing government schemes should be utilised and strengthened** rather than creating an entirely new delivery architecture.
5. **Local communities should be given a greater role in management**, and the principle of “one Gram Panchayat, one grazing land” can provide an institutional anchor for protecting common grazing resources.
6. **Pastoralists and livestock keepers should be treated as stakeholders and potential stewards**, rather than merely as users of rangelands.
7. **Traditional pastoral knowledge should be combined with scientific management** to promote sustainable grazing and restoration.
8. **Payments for ecosystem services and suitable carbon-credit mechanisms should be explored** so that local communities can receive a share of the wider ecological benefits generated by healthy rangelands.

Conclusion: India's rangelands should not be viewed as empty or “wastelands” awaiting more productive use. They already provide fodder, livelihoods, biodiversity, soil protection, carbon storage and drought resilience. The need of the hour is to recognise their economic and ecological value, strengthen institutional management and involve local communities in their sustainable stewardship.

Question: Rangelands and grazing commons play an important role in India's rural economy and ecological resilience. Discuss their significance and suggest measures for their sustainable management.

Source: [Business Line](#)

Household Debt, Financing Today Against Tomorrow

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian Economy

Introduction

Household borrowing is becoming an important part of consumption through personal loans, cards, digital lending, gold loans and consumer finance. India's household debt has risen, with borrowing shifting towards non-housing loans. The central issue is whether borrowing creates assets or finances present consumption against uncertain future income.

Current Status of Household Debt in India

1. **Rising household leverage:** Household debt rose from **39.2% of GDP in March 2021** to **42% in June 2023** and **45.5% in September 2025**.

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2. **Non-housing loans gaining share:** Non-housing retail loans reached **58.4% of household debt in March 2026**, up from around 50% during 2019-20, growing faster than housing loans.
3. **Bank personal lending expansion:** Bank personal loans increased from **₹5.53 lakh crore in March 2019** to **₹17.32 lakh crore in March 2026**, while NBFC retail lending also expanded rapidly.
4. **Small-ticket digital borrowing:** Fintechs gave **13.2 crore loans worth ₹2.15 lakh crore** between April 2022 and March 2026, with an average size of **₹16,238**.
5. **Gold loans surging:** Bank gold loans rose from **₹24,671 crore in March 2019** to **₹4.61 lakh crore in March 2026**, while NBFC gold lending expanded strongly.
6. **Household savings recovering partly:** Net financial savings improved from **5.2% of GDP in 2023-24** to **around 6% in 2024-25**, but remained below pre-pandemic levels.
7. **Global position:** India's household debt remains below China, Malaysia and Thailand, but exceeds Chile, Brazil and South Africa, remaining high relative to per-capita income.

Causes of Rising Household Borrowing

1. **Easy digital credit:** Digital lending, instant personal loans and online financing have made borrowing quicker during everyday purchases.
2. **Fintech expansion:** Fintech firms held **56.8% of small-ticket personal loans below ₹50,000 in March 2026**, with their loan book growing **41.6%**.
3. **Better borrower assessment:** UPI transactions give lenders information about informal workers' income and repayment capacity, enabling access that was previously difficult.
4. **Changing borrowing attitudes:** Younger Indians are increasingly comfortable using loans for consumption, as social taboos around routine borrowing have weakened.
5. **Rising consumption aspirations:** Household aspirations are increasing faster than incomes, so borrowing bridges desired purchases and current affordability.
6. **Digital spending behaviour:** Greater use of digital payments can reduce restraint associated with cash spending and may encourage higher consumption.
7. **Point-of-purchase financing:** Credit is increasingly offered during smartphone, airline-ticket and online purchases, making borrowing only a click away.
8. **Gold price increase:** Rising gold prices have increased borrowing capacity against existing jewellery, encouraging greater use of gold as collateral.

Implications and Emerging Concerns

1. **Higher repayment burden:** Rising debt-servicing obligations can reduce households' disposable income and limit discretionary spending.
2. **Greater borrower vulnerability:** Informal, casual and self-employed workers face greater repayment risks because their incomes are less predictable.
3. **Rising loan delinquencies:** Fintech personal-loan delinquencies increased from around **4.5% in March 2024** to **6.4% in March 2026**, with smaller loans showing higher delinquency rates.
4. **Multiple-loan stress:** Borrowers using **five or more unsecured lenders** show higher impairment, indicating greater repayment stress among highly leveraged borrowers.
5. **Debt rollover risk:** Some borrowers may be using new loans to repay older loans, especially when small-ticket borrowing is used for regular expenses.
6. **Gold collateral risk:** Rapid growth in gold loans increases vulnerability if gold prices fall, as weaker collateral can increase borrower stress and defaults.
7. **Consumption versus asset creation:** Borrowing for houses, education and productive assets can create long-term value, while borrowing for routine consumption mainly commits future income.
8. **Distress borrowing and income constraints:** When households borrow for food, healthcare, rent or other essential needs because current income is inadequate, debt postpones rather than resolves the underlying income constraint.

Way Forward

1. **Promote sustainable incomes:** Stronger and more stable income growth can reduce the need to use borrowing as a substitute for inadequate earnings.
2. **Protect essential household needs:** Better social protection can reduce dependence on loans for healthcare, education, housing and old-age needs.
3. **Encourage productive credit:** Lending should support productive activity, education, housing and asset creation rather than mainly financing routine consumption.
4. **Strengthen responsible lending:** Policy should distinguish productive credit from distress credit rather than restricting household lending indiscriminately.
5. **Improve borrower awareness:** Households need greater awareness of borrowing costs, repayment obligations and risks from multiple unsecured loans.
6. **Monitor vulnerable borrowers:** Monitor borrowers using several lenders or spending a large share of monthly income on repayments.
7. **Maintain formal credit access:** Formal credit remains important for household welfare and development, so regulation does not unnecessarily restrict useful borrowing.
8. **Watch collateral risks:** Rapid gold-loan growth requires attention because falling gold prices could weaken collateral and increase stress.

Conclusion

India's rising household debt is not automatically harmful because credit can support investment and household welfare. The key concern is borrowing for routine consumption and repeated repayment. Sustainable income growth, productive credit, responsible lending and stronger social protection can help households use credit to build long-term financial security rather than depend on future income over time.

Question for practice:

Examine the rising household debt in India, its causes, implications, and the way forward.

Source: The Hindu

The India-EFTA Partnership: One Plus One Equals Three

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

One year after the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) entered into force, its importance goes beyond tariff reduction. The agreement combines market access with investment, employment, services, technology and sustainable development. Its wider potential is visible through Iceland's experience in geothermal energy, carbon management and fisheries, while Arctic cooperation adds another dimension. Thus, TEPA can develop from a trade agreement into a broader economic and knowledge partnership.

Understanding EFTA and TEPA

1. **EFTA as a European economic bloc:** European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organisation of **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland**, established in **1960 by seven Member States** to promote free trade and economic integration.
2. **EFTA's position in Europe:** EFTA is one of the **three important economic blocs in Europe**, alongside the **European Union (EU)** and the **United Kingdom (UK)**, giving its members a separate platform for economic cooperation.

3. **TEPA's origin and status:** India and EFTA signed **Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)** in **March 2024 in New Delhi**, and the agreement entered into force in **October 2025**.
 - **India's first FTA with these countries:** TEPA is India's **first Free Trade Agreement with four developed European nations**, namely Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.
 - **Comprehensive framework:** TEPA contains **14 chapters** covering goods, rules of origin, trade facilitation, trade remedies, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers, services, investment, Intellectual Property Rights and sustainable development.

Key Features of TEPA

1. **Extensive market access:** EFTA offered concessions on **92.2% of tariff lines**, covering **99.6% of the value of India's exports**, while India offered concessions on 82.7% covering 95.3% of EFTA exports.
2. **Investment commitment:** EFTA states have committed to increase FDI in India by **\$50 billion in the first 10 years** and another **\$50 billion in the next five years**.
3. **Employment commitment:** The investment framework aims to facilitate **one million direct jobs in India** and create stronger links between Indian skills and European technology ecosystems.
4. **Investment facilitation:** The **India-EFTA Desk**, operational since February 2025, acts as a single-window platform and promotes investment, joint ventures and SME cooperation.
5. **Protection of sensitive sectors:** India excluded dairy, soya, coal, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and selected food products, while some Make in India and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) products receive phased tariff reductions over **5–10 years**.
6. **Services and professional mobility:** India has made commitments in **105 services sub-sectors**, while EFTA offers cover 128 from Switzerland, 114 from Norway, 110 from Iceland and 107 from Liechtenstein.
7. **Mutual recognition and IPR:** TEPA includes **Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRAs)** for professions such as nursing, chartered accountancy and architecture, while its IPR provisions retain India's flexibility on public health and generics.

Sectoral Impact and Opportunities for India

1. **Agriculture and allied products:** India's exports to EFTA were valued at **\$72.37 million in FY2024–25**, with guar gum, processed vegetables, basmati rice, pulses, fruits and grapes among the major products.
2. **Coffee and tea:** EFTA countries import around **\$175 million of coffee**, while zero duty on coffee lines improves access; India's average tea export realisation increased from **\$5.93/kg to \$6.77/kg** in 2024–25.
3. **Marine products:** Norway provides duty exemption of up to **13.16%** on fish and shrimp feed, while Iceland eliminates tariffs up to 10% on several seafood products and reduces fish-feed tariffs by up to 55%.
4. **Engineering and manufacturing:** Engineering exports reached **\$315 million in FY2024–25**, up 18% year-on-year, with opportunities in electric machinery, copper products, energy-efficient systems and precision engineering.
5. **Textiles and consumer goods:** Textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, sports goods and toys gain from duty stability, zero-duty access or simpler standards and conformity arrangements.
6. **Chemicals and allied products:** EFTA has provided zero or reduced tariffs on **95% of India's chemical exports**, while selected exports are projected to increase from **\$49 million to \$65–70 million**.

7. **Electronics and software:** The investment commitment and access to high-income European markets can support Indian electronics firms, MSMEs and Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEMs) seeking to expand internationally.

Iceland and India: Geothermal Energy and Energy Security

1. **Geothermal expertise:** Iceland has nearly a century of experience in the direct use of low- and medium-temperature geothermal heat, beyond electricity generation.
2. **Indian agricultural applications:** Geothermal drying and cooling can help Indian farmers process produce and avoid being forced to sell immediately during harvest.
3. **Himalayan applications:** India's Himalayan geothermal belt can draw on Icelandic experience for direct-use applications.
4. **High-altitude energy security:** Direct geothermal heat can provide energy to northern high-altitude communities and installations without depending on fuel supply lines that may close for months.

Iceland and India: CCUS and the Blue Economy

1. **India's CCUS potential:** NITI Aayog estimated that India could capture around **750 million tonnes of CO₂ annually by 2050**, while national **Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS)** research is moving towards commercial applications.
2. **Carbon storage:** CarbFix has demonstrated that more than **95% of injected CO₂ can turn into stone within two years**, with India's Deccan Trap basalts offering similar geological characteristics.
3. **Carbon utilisation:** Iceland's experience in converting captured CO₂ into methanol can support Indian e-methanol projects, including the proposed **3,00,000-tonne-a-year project in Raigad**.
 - **Technology partnership:** The opportunity is not limited to equipment exports but includes **technology licensing, storage assessment, monitoring, verification and co-development**.
 - **Fisheries and processing:** Iceland offers expertise in seafood quality, cold-chain logistics and value-added processing, including the use of around **90% of each cod landed**.
 - **Value from existing resources:** India can create additional value, jobs and exports by better using existing fish catches rather than increasing the volume of fishing.

Wider Partnership: Arctic Cooperation and Europe-India Linkages

1. **Arctic cooperation:** Iceland, a founding member of the Arctic Council, can provide India with a direct bilateral channel for Arctic governance and research.
2. **India's Arctic engagement:** India has been an **Observer in the Arctic Council since 2013**, published its **Arctic Policy in 2022**, and operates the **Himadri research station in Svalbard**.
3. **Complementary engagement:** Bilateral cooperation with Iceland can complement India's existing multilateral engagement in the Arctic and strengthen cooperation in research and governance.
4. **Energy and Arctic stewardship:** India and Iceland can connect cooperation in **energy, trade and Arctic stewardship**, linking economic interests with the sustainable management of a changing Arctic.
5. **Complement to EU-India FTA:** TEPA is **not a rival to the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** but can complement it by providing an existing model for wider Europe-India economic cooperation.
6. **Broader European partnership:** TEPA can demonstrate how trade agreements can create wider cooperation in **investment, technology, jobs, energy, fisheries and sustainable development**.

Way Forward

1. **Translate investment commitments into projects:** The \$100 billion commitment should support actual manufacturing, research, innovation and technology partnerships in India.
2. **Scale clean-technology cooperation:** Geothermal energy and CCUS cooperation can move from pilot projects towards wider applications through technology licensing, joint development and knowledge sharing.
3. **Increase value addition:** India can use Icelandic expertise to improve processing and value creation in agriculture, fisheries and industrial sectors without increasing resource extraction.
4. **Strengthen Arctic cooperation:** Iceland can provide India with a direct bilateral channel for Arctic governance and research, complementing India's Observer role in the Arctic Council and its Himadri station in Svalbard.
5. **Build wider European cooperation:** TEPA can complement the **EU-India FTA** and serve as a working model for wider Europe-India cooperation in trade, investment and technology.

Conclusion

TEPA can take India-EFTA relations beyond tariff reduction towards investment, jobs, technology and sustainability. Its wider value lies in combining India's market, workforce and industrial base with EFTA's capital and specialised expertise. Iceland shows how such cooperation can support energy security, carbon management, fisheries and Arctic engagement, giving practical meaning to **"one plus one equals three"** in practice.

Question for practice:

Examine how the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) can strengthen India's trade, investment, technology and strategic partnerships.

Source: The Hindu

For constituting poll body, a lesson from the UN

Source: The post **"For constituting poll body, a lesson from the UN"** has been created based on **"For constituting poll body, a lesson from the UN"** published in **"Indian Express"** on 3rd October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: Two recent developments highlight the need to protect public trust in India's electoral system. Concerns were raised over the functioning of the CEC and senior EC officials, while a Supreme Court split verdict stressed that the executive should not have exclusive control over appointing the CEC and ECs. These developments underline the need for an independent and impartial Election Commission.

About Article 324 of the Indian Constitution

1. Article 324 in the Indian Constitution **gives power to the Election Commission to direct, control, and conduct elections to all Parliament, to the Legislature of every state and of elections to the offices of the President and Vice President** held under the Constitution.
2. Article 324(1) of the Indian Constitution vests **the superintendence, direction, and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of all elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President** in the Election Commission of India.

3. Article 324(2) provides that the Election Commission comprises the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners as the President may determine from time to time.
4. Article 324(3) further stipulates that, when other Election Commissioners are appointed, the Chief Election Commissioner shall serve as the Commission's Chairman.

Present Appointment Framework

1. For nearly **75 years**, Parliament did not enact a law governing the appointment of the CEC and ECs, and the executive made these appointments.
2. In **March 2023**, the Supreme Court ruled against exclusive executive control and provided for a selection committee comprising the **Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Chief Justice of India**, until Parliament enacted a law.
3. Parliament subsequently enacted a law in **2023** that **excluded the Chief Justice of India** and included a **Union Cabinet Minister** in the three-member selection committee.
4. The **Cabinet Secretary prepares the shortlist**, while decisions of the committee are taken by **majority vote**.
5. The concern raised is that the presence of the Prime Minister and a Cabinet Minister may give the government a dominant position in the selection process.

Why a Consensus-Based Mechanism is Important

1. The Election Commission exercises significant administrative powers and its decisions directly affect the **electoral process and public confidence**.
 - a. The CEC and ECs must therefore be perceived as **fair and independent**, not merely formally independent.
2. A selection process involving both the **government and Opposition** can help create broader institutional trust.
3. Consensus can ensure that the selected candidate is **not distrusted by either side**, even if complete agreement on the most technically qualified candidate is difficult.

Lesson from the UN

1. The procedure for selecting the **UN Secretary-General** provides a relevant institutional lesson.
2. The **process** requires that none of the **five permanent members of the UN Security Council** exercise their veto against the candidate.
3. Consequently, the candidate who eventually emerges may not necessarily be the person considered the most technically qualified by every member, but should be someone who is **acceptable and not distrusted by the major stakeholders**.
4. A similar principle could be considered for appointments to the ECI, where **consensus and removal of distrust** can strengthen institutional legitimacy.

Possible Institutional Arrangement

1. The selection committee could include: **Chief Justice of India** as Chairperson; **Union Cabinet Minister**; and **Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha**.
2. The role of the **Cabinet Secretary** could be important in preparing a credible shortlist.

3. The shortlist should include persons with **senior administrative experience**, while also ensuring that candidates are not perceived as having political leanings or being particularly close to political leadership.
4. Seniority and experience are relevant because the ECI requires considerable **administrative acumen and institutional experience**.

Challenges

1. Achieving consensus among the government and Opposition may require **multiple rounds of discussion**.
2. **Complete consensus may not always be possible**, as also illustrated by the ongoing process for selecting the next UN Secretary-General.
3. However, the objective should be to **minimise distrust and ensure broad acceptance** of the eventual choice.

Way Forward

1. **Build bipartisan consensus:** The government and Opposition should work towards a selection process based on broad agreement rather than simple numerical majority.
2. **Strengthen the role of the CJI:** The Chief Justice of India can provide an independent institutional voice in the selection process and help reduce perceptions of executive dominance.
3. **Ensure a credible shortlist:** The Cabinet Secretary should recommend candidates based on **administrative experience, integrity, seniority and demonstrated political neutrality**.
4. **Maintain transparency:** Clear and publicly known **eligibility criteria and selection procedures** should be established to enhance public confidence.
5. **Avoid political proximity:** Candidates who are perceived to be particularly close to the political leadership should be avoided so that the ECI's independence is protected both **in substance and in perception**.
6. **Adopt the principle of consensus:** The UN Security Council's approach provides a useful lesson — where complete agreement is difficult, the focus can be on finding a candidate who is **acceptable to all major stakeholders and not distrusted by any**.
7. **Protect institutional independence:** The appointment mechanism should ultimately ensure that the CEC and ECs can discharge their constitutional responsibility of ensuring **free and fair elections without fear or favour**.

Conclusion: The credibility of India's electoral democracy depends not only on conducting elections but also on ensuring **public trust in the institution conducting them**. A selection mechanism that encourages **government-Opposition agreement, institutional independence and transparency** can strengthen the ECI. Thus, the emphasis should be on selecting persons whose **experience, impartiality and independence are widely trusted**, while using consensus as an important safeguard against perceptions of political bias.

Question: Why is a consensus-based mechanism for appointing the CEC and ECs important for electoral democracy? Discuss.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Organ donation in India: How the system works and what law says

Source: The post “Organ donation in India: How the system works and what law says” has been created based on “Organ donation in India: How the system works and what law says” published in “Business Standard” on 3rd October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: The Karnataka High Court recently allowed a 52-year-old unmarried man to altruistically donate one of his kidneys to an unrelated recipient. The state government informed the court that it is in the process of formulating guidelines to establish a mechanism for regulating cases of altruistic organ donation. This case raises questions about India’s regulation of organ donation, the legality of altruistic donation to unrelated recipients, and safeguards against organ trading.

About Organ donation in India and Legal framework

1. Organ donation in India is primarily regulated by the **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994**, along with its **2011 amendments and 2014 Rules**.
2. The framework aims to facilitate organ transplantation while ensuring **voluntary donation, informed consent and prevention of commercial organ trade**.
3. **THOTA, 1994** regulates the **removal, storage and transplantation of human organs and tissues** for therapeutic purposes.
4. It provides rules for both **living and deceased donors**.
5. It also aims to prevent **commercial dealings in human organs and tissues**.

Institutional Framework

1. **NOTTO (National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation)** functions at the national level.
 - a. It maintains the **national registry of donors and recipients**.
 - b. It establishes protocols and oversees **fair organ distribution**.
 - c. It implements the **National Organ Transplant Programme**.
2. **ROTTs (Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisations)** and **SOTTOs (State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisations)** operate at regional and state levels.
3. Together, this **three-tier system** coordinates organ procurement, waiting lists and awareness.

Who Can Donate?

1. THOTA permits donation by **living donors** as well as **deceased donors after cardiac or brain death**.
2. Living donors are broadly classified as:
 - a. **Near relatives**, including spouses, children, grandchildren, siblings, parents and grandparents.
 - b. **Non-related donors**, who require approval from an **Authorisation Committee**.
3. A near-relative donation requires permission from the **doctor in charge of the transplant centre**, while non-related donation requires clearance from the appropriate **State Authorisation Committee**.

About Altruistic Organ Donation

- **Altruistic donation** means donating an organ without expecting monetary payment or any prohibited benefit.
- It is legally permitted under **Section 9(3) of THOTA** for non-relatives when motivated by “**affection or attachment**” or **other special reasons**, provided there is no commercial transaction.
- Non-related donations are subject to strict scrutiny by the **Authorisation Committee**.
- The Committee examines whether the donation is **Voluntary, Free from financial motives and Free from pressure, inducement, influence or allurement**.
- The **2014 Rules** prescribe forms requiring donors and recipients to disclose the reasons for donation and affirm that the decision is voluntary.
- Courts, including the **Kerala and Karnataka High Courts**, have recognised genuine altruistic and anonymous donations to strangers, while stressing that authorities should not reject them merely on vague suspicion.
 - **Kerala** has established formal guidelines for altruistic donations, while **Karnataka** is developing structured protocols.

Prevention of Illegal Organ Trade

- THOTA **prohibits commercial dealings in human organs**.
- **Section 19** penalises:
 - Paying or receiving money for supplying an organ.
 - Offering or seeking an organ for payment.
 - Negotiating arrangements involving payment.
 - Managing organisations involved in commercial organ transactions.
 - Advertising paid organ supply.
 - Creating or submitting false documents to disguise a commercial donation as a legitimate donation.
- Unauthorised removal of an organ can attract **up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine up to ₹20 lakh**.
- Commercial dealings can attract **5–10 years' imprisonment and a fine of ₹20 lakh to ₹1 crore**.

International Framework

1. The **WHO Guiding Principles on Human Cell, Tissue and Organ Transplantation**, endorsed by the World Health Assembly, provide the **main international framework** for organ donation and transplantation.
2. These principles apply to organs obtained from **both living and deceased donors** and emphasise **voluntary and non-remunerated donation, informed consent, donor protection and equitable allocation** of organs.
3. **Altruistic donation** is recognised as an important principle under the WHO framework.
4. The WHO encourages countries to establish systems for the **voluntary and non-remunerated donation** of organs from both living and deceased donors.
5. However, the **specific rules governing altruistic donation** are determined by individual countries through their **national laws**.

Challenges

1. A major challenge is distinguishing **genuine altruistic donation from disguised commercial transactions**.

2. Excessive suspicion may discourage legitimate donations, while inadequate scrutiny may facilitate **organ trafficking**.
3. Differences in implementation and guidelines across states can also create uncertainty.

Way Forward

1. States should develop **clear and uniform protocols** for altruistic and unrelated donations.
2. Authorisation Committees should ensure **transparent, timely and evidence-based scrutiny**.
3. Strong coordination among **NOTTO, ROTOs and SOTTOs** should be maintained.
4. Public awareness should be strengthened to promote **voluntary and non-commercial organ donation**.
5. Strict verification of documents and financial relationships should continue to prevent **commercial exploitation**.
6. The system should balance **individual autonomy and altruism** with safeguards against coercion, fraud and organ trafficking.

Conclusion: India's organ donation framework seeks to create a balance between **facilitating life-saving transplantation and preventing exploitation**. A transparent, voluntary and non-commercial system, supported by effective institutional coordination and safeguards, can strengthen **public trust and ethical organ transplantation**

Question: Discuss the legal and institutional framework governing organ donation in India. How does it balance altruistic donation with the need to prevent commercial organ trading?

Source: [Business Standard](#)

India's Model BIT — A Decade Later, Amid Changes

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Indian economy

Introduction

India is revising its **Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** nearly a decade after adopting the 2015 framework. The review comes as India's treaty practice and the global investment regime have changed. The key issue is not simply whether investors should receive more or less protection, but how India's experience since 2015 should shape the new framework. The revised model must balance **investor protection, State regulatory space, treaty flexibility and changing international investment rules** while guiding future negotiations.

For detailed information on [Model Bilateral Investment Treaty \(BIT\)](#) read this article

Why India Adopted a Cautious Framework

1. **Post-White Industries Context:** The White Industries v. India award (2011) and wider concerns over investor-State arbitration encouraged India to adopt a cautious treaty framework.

2. **Narrow Investment Definition:** The 2015 Model BIT adopted a narrower definition of investment to limit the scope of treaty-based investor claims.
3. **Carefully Framed Protections:** The model contained specific substantive protections and regulatory exceptions, giving the State greater space to pursue public-interest policies.
4. **Five-Year Local Remedies:** Investors were required to exhaust judicial and administrative remedies for at least five years before starting treaty arbitration.
5. **State Regulatory Space:** The 2015 framework sought to preserve the State's ability to regulate in the public interest through carefully framed protections and regulatory exceptions.

Evolution in India's Treaty Practice

1. **New-Generation Investment Agreements:** India has concluded **new-generation investment agreements with the UAE, Uzbekistan and Israel**, showing greater flexibility in its treaty practice since 2015.
2. **Shorter Local-Remedy Period:** The India-UAE BIT reduced the local-remedies period to three years, compared with five years under the 2015 Model BIT.
3. **India-Israel Agreement:** The India-Israel BIA, which entered into force in July 2026, also provides a three-year period for pursuing local remedies.
4. **Greater Treaty Flexibility:** These agreements show that India's treaty practice has become more flexible since 2015, especially on dispute-related provisions.
5. **Model BIT as a Starting Point:** A Model BIT should provide a negotiating framework while allowing individual treaties to reflect the specific circumstances and priorities of partner countries.

India as a Rule-Shaper in the Global Investment Regime

1. **Changing Global Priorities:** The international investment regime is moving towards investment facilitation, cooperation, sustainable development and more clearly defined investor protections.
2. **Reduced Reliance on Traditional ISDS:** The international investment regime is moving towards less reliance on traditional Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) and greater emphasis on investment facilitation, cooperation and sustainable development.
3. **UNCITRAL Reform Process:** **United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)** is examining reforms involving a permanent tribunal, appellate mechanism, damages and compensation, and dispute prevention.
4. **Opportunity for India:** India can use its treaty practice to act as a rule-shaper in international investment law rather than remaining only a rule-taker.

5. **Need for a Future-Oriented Model:** India's revised model must respond to these changes in international investment rules, rather than simply revisit the 2015 framework.

Key Issues for the Revised Model BIT

Need for Reassessment: India's changing treaty practice and the evolving international investment regime require a fresh assessment of **key provisions in the Model BIT**, particularly MFN, investor obligations and dispute settlement.

A. Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) Provision

- **MFN Status in India's Treaties:** The MFN provision is absent from most Indian investment treaties, limiting investors' ability to claim better protection available under other treaties.
- **MFN and Dispute Settlement:** In **Maffezini v. Spain**, an MFN clause was used to bypass an 18-month local-court requirement by relying on more favourable dispute-settlement provisions.
- **Contrasting Judicial Approach:** **Plama v. Bulgaria** rejected importing dispute-settlement provisions through an MFN clause when the treaty did not clearly permit it.
- **Need for Defined Scope:** The central issue is the **scope of MFN protection**, particularly its application to dispute-settlement provisions.

B. Investor Obligations and Counterclaims

- **Emerging Indian Practice:** The India-Uzbekistan BIT allows a State to make a **counterclaim against an investor or investment**, reflecting a broader approach to investor responsibilities.
- **Investor Obligations:** The revised framework must consider whether and how **legal obligations should be placed on investors**, alongside protections granted to them.
- **Counterclaim Framework:** The issue also involves identifying the **circumstances in which a State can raise counterclaims** against an investor.

C. Dispute Settlement and Local Remedies

- **Five-Year Requirement:** The 2015 Model BIT requires investors to exhaust **judicial and administrative remedies for five years** before initiating treaty arbitration.
- **Changed Treaty Practice:** India's newer agreements with the **UAE and Israel** use a three-year period, showing a shift from the earlier approach.
- **Dispute Prevention:** The evolving international discussion also raises the issue of **consultation and dispute-prevention mechanisms before arbitration**, including under UNCITRAL Working Group III.

Way Forward

1. **Balance Investor Protection with Regulatory Space:** The revised framework should protect legitimate investor interests while preserving India's ability to regulate in the public interest.
2. **Clarify Expropriation and FET:** Precise provisions on expropriation and Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET) can reduce interpretational uncertainty while safeguarding the State's regulatory powers.
3. **Define Investor Responsibilities:** Where India wants investors to follow particular responsibilities, these should be expressed through clear legal obligations rather than broad policy statements.
4. **Ensure Greater Clarity:** The model should clearly define the rights and obligations of investors and States, reducing uncertainty in treaty interpretation.
5. **Improve Workability:** The framework should provide a practical basis for future negotiations while allowing individual treaties to address specific circumstances.
6. **Retain Treaty Flexibility:** The Model BIT should establish common principles while allowing necessary adjustments based on the priorities of individual treaty partners.
7. **Reflect India's Current Position:** The revised framework should incorporate lessons from the past decade and respond to changes in the international investment regime.

Conclusion

India's revised Model BIT should reflect **the lessons of a decade of treaty practice and changes in the international investment regime**. It should provide clear and workable rules, balance investor protection with India's regulatory space, and retain flexibility for individual treaties. The aim should be neither stronger investor rights nor greater State control alone, but a **balanced framework suited to India's present needs**.

Question for practice:

Discuss the need to revise India's Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) and the key issues that should shape the new framework.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

CAFE Smokescreen

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

Introduction

India's **CAFE-III norms** will govern passenger vehicles from **1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032**. They aim to improve **fuel efficiency and reduce CO₂ emissions** through tighter targets, EV super-credits, technology credits and benefits for alternative fuels. However, the **weight-sensitive design** raises concerns because heavier vehicles can still receive higher permissible fuel consumption. Generous credits may also weaken

actual emission reductions and allow greater **internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle output** within manufacturer fleets.

What is CAFE and CAFE Norms?

1. **Full Form:** CAFE stands for **Corporate Average Fuel Economy**, which refers to the average fuel efficiency of vehicles sold by an automobile manufacturer.
2. **Meaning of CAFE:** It measures **how much fuel a manufacturer's overall fleet consumes on average**, rather than judging each vehicle separately.
3. **CAFE Norms:** These are **mandatory fuel-efficiency standards** that require automobile manufacturers to keep their fleet's average fuel consumption within prescribed limits.
4. **Emission Link:** Since lower fuel consumption generally means lower CO₂ emissions, **CAFE norms also serve as a tool for reducing carbon emissions** from passenger vehicles.
5. **Fleet-Based Approach:** Compliance is determined through the **weighted average of the manufacturer's fleet**, so the composition and efficiency of its vehicles affect the final target.
6. **CAFE vs Bharat Stage:** CAFE focuses mainly on **fleet-level fuel efficiency and CO₂ emissions**, whereas Bharat Stage norms regulate harmful vehicle pollutants such as **NOx, particulate matter, CO and hydrocarbons**.
7. **Legal Basis:** India introduced CAFE norms in **2017 under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001**, making manufacturers responsible for improving the average efficiency of their passenger-vehicle fleets.

Status of CAFE Norms in India

1. **Three CAFE phases:** India has had **CAFE-I and CAFE-II**, while **CAFE-III has now been notified** for the next five-year period. It will replace the existing norms from **1 April 2027** and remain applicable until **31 March 2032**.
2. **CAFE-I (2017–22):** The first phase introduced **fleet-level fuel-efficiency standards** for passenger vehicles, making manufacturers responsible for the average efficiency of their vehicle fleet.
3. **CAFE-II (2022–27):** The second phase **tightened the fuel-efficiency requirements** and continued the fleet-average approach, forming the regulatory base that CAFE-III will replace from April 2027.
4. **CAFE-III (2027–32):** The new phase will apply from **1 April 2027 to 31 March 2032** and progressively tighten fuel-consumption targets over five years.
5. **Coverage:** CAFE-III covers **M1 passenger vehicles manufactured or imported for Indian sale**, including petrol, diesel, CNG, LPG, hybrid and electric vehicles.
6. **Testing transition:** From April 2027, manufacturers will report vehicle performance under both **Modified Indian Driving Cycle (MIDC)** and **Worldwide Harmonized Light Vehicles Test Procedure (WLTP)**, supporting a gradual shift towards globally harmonised vehicle testing.

Key Features of CAFE III

1. **Progressively tighter targets:** The fuel-consumption benchmark tightens from **3.996 litres/100 km in 2027-28 to 3.3273 litres/100 km in 2031-32**, exceeding 16% improvement.
2. **Weight-sensitive targets:** The revised target curve gives **relatively softer targets to lighter vehicles and requires greater fuel-efficiency improvement from heavier vehicles**, with the reference weight rising from **1,082 kg to 1,229 kg**.

3. **Small-car treatment:** The final norms **remove the specific carve-out for small cars** proposed in the draft, but modify the formula to provide some benefit to this category. This recognises that **small cars are generally more fuel-efficient than larger vehicles**.
4. **Reduced hybrid and flex-fuel incentives:** The final framework **reduces the rewards for hybrid and flex-fuel vehicles compared with earlier drafts**, while retaining incentives for cleaner technologies.
5. **EV super-credits: EV super-credit concern:** A **3× super-credit means one Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) is counted as three vehicles while** calculating an **Original Equipment Manufacturer's (OEM) fleet-average performance**. This can make the fleet appear cleaner in compliance calculations and potentially allow greater **internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle output**.
6. **Technology credits:** Manufacturers can get compliance benefits for adopting **12 recognised fuel-saving technologies**, compared with four earlier. Each eligible technology can reduce the **calculated fleet CO₂ emissions by 1 g/km**, with the total benefit capped at **9 g/km**.
7. **Credit-debit mechanism:** Manufacturers exceeding targets generate **credits**, while those missing targets accumulate debits under a market-based compliance system.
8. **Credit trading and buyout:** Credits can be **carried forward, traded or exchanged**, while manufacturers can purchase eligible credits through the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency**.
9. **Cleaner-fuel recognition:** The **Carbon Neutrality Factor** provides compliance benefits for E20-plus petrol, flex-fuel ethanol and CNG vehicles.
10. **Small manufacturers:** Manufacturers with **fewer than 1,000 eligible vehicles** are exempt from specific fleet-average obligations but must continue reporting fuel-consumption data.

Significance

1. **Lower fossil-fuel use:** Stricter fleet-average targets can reduce fuel consumption across new passenger vehicles.
2. **Decarbonisation support:** Linking fuel efficiency with CO₂ performance can contribute to **reducing carbon emissions from road transport**.
3. **Technology innovation:** Recognition of EVs, hybrids, alternative fuels and fuel-saving technologies gives manufacturers **multiple technological pathways for compliance**.
4. **Energy security:** Lower fuel consumption can support India's energy security by reducing dependence on fossil fuels.
5. **Regulatory certainty:** The **five-year roadmap and flexible compliance mechanisms** provide manufacturers greater predictability for investment and technology planning.
6. **Consumer choices:** Multiple recognised technologies allow manufacturers to develop **different vehicle pathways**, potentially giving consumers wider technology choices.

Key Concerns with CAFE III

1. **Weight-based formula:** The weight-linked formula can allow **higher permissible fuel consumption as fleet weight rises**, even though the revised curve also requires greater efficiency improvements from heavier vehicles.
2. **Large-vehicle costs:** Large vehicles **consume more fuel and occupy more road and parking space**, creating wider costs for society. These vehicles should therefore **bear higher taxes** to reflect their greater resource and infrastructure burden.
3. **EV super-credit concern:** The 3× multiplier can make an OEM's fleet appear cleaner in compliance calculations than its actual vehicle mix, potentially allowing greater internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle output
4. **Coal-based electricity:** EVs have no tailpipe emissions, but **electricity generated largely from coal means their overall emissions are not necessarily zero**.
5. **Ethanol concession:** Giving petrol vehicles a standards concession for ethanol blending is questionable because **ethanol also has significant life-cycle emissions**.
6. **Gentle tightening:** Although targets become stricter over five years, the **gradual transition may not substantially change the existing vehicle mix**.

Way Forward

1. **Weight-neutral efficiency standard:** Set a strict industry-wide fuel-efficiency standard without linking compliance primarily to vehicle weight.
2. **Technology flexibility:** Allow **Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)** to decide their **vehicle and technology mix**, provided they meet the common efficiency benchmark.
3. **Real emission reduction:** Design super-credits so that they encourage **actual additional emission reductions**, rather than mainly improving calculated compliance.
4. **Life-cycle assessment:** Assess EVs and alternative fuels through their **overall life-cycle emissions**, rather than relying only on tailpipe performance.
5. **Broader vehicle costs:** Consider the **fuel, road-space and parking costs of large vehicles** when framing the wider regulatory approach.

Conclusion

CAFE-III strengthens India's framework for improving fuel efficiency, reducing fossil-fuel use and supporting cleaner vehicle technologies. However, weight-sensitive targets and generous credits can weaken the link between regulatory compliance and actual emission reduction. A stronger approach should set strict industry-wide efficiency standards, preserve technology flexibility and assess vehicles and fuels through their life-cycle emissions, while addressing the wider costs of larger vehicles.

Question for practice:

Examine the key features and concerns of India's CAFE-III norms in promoting fuel efficiency and reducing vehicle emissions.

Source: [Businessline](#); [The Print](#)

The tussle for top posts in India's CAPFs: IPS officers or force veterans?

Source: The post "The tussle for top posts in India's CAPFs: IPS officers or force veterans?" has been created based on "The tussle for top posts in India's CAPFs: IPS officers or force veterans?" published in "Indian Express" on 5th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: The Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) have their own Group A executive cadres, whose officers generally enter as Assistant Commandants and rise to senior command positions. However, senior posts have traditionally also been occupied by IPS officers on deputation, leading to a long-standing dispute over career progression and cadre rights.

Background of the Dispute

1. **CAPF cadre vs IPS deputation:** CAPF officers argue that officers who have spent their entire careers in the forces should have greater opportunities to occupy senior command positions.
2. **Deputation provisions:** Before the 2026 Act, recruitment rules provided for **20% of DIG posts and 50% of IG posts** to be filled through deputation.
3. **Promotion bottleneck:** As senior posts are limited and a proportion is reserved for deputation, CAPF cadre officers face stagnation and reduced promotional opportunities.

NFFU and Organised Group A Service Status

1. CAPF officers had long demanded **Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU)** to address stagnation when promotion was not possible due to lack of vacancies.
2. The **Delhi High Court ruled in their favour in 2015**, and the **Supreme Court upheld the decision in 2019**.
3. Subsequently, the Union Cabinet granted **Organised Group A Service (OGAS) status and NFFU benefits** to Group A executive cadre officers of CAPFs.
4. However, CAPF officers argue that NFFU has not completely solved the problem because it operates through existing Recruitment Rules.
5. Under these rules, **an officer must complete the prescribed period in a particular rank** before becoming eligible for the next grade. Therefore, **receiving higher pay through NFFU without actual promotion may not start the service period** required for the next financial upgrade.
6. CAPF officers therefore seek **service rules based on overall qualifying service rather than vacancy-based promotions**.

About Supreme Court Judgment, 2025

1. On **May 23, 2025**, the Supreme Court held that CAPFs should be treated as **OGAS not merely for NFFU but also for other cadre-related purposes**.
2. The Court directed a **cadre review and review of existing service and recruitment rules** after consultation with CAPF cadre representatives.
3. Most importantly, it directed that posts earmarked for deputation **up to the Senior Administrative Grade (DIG and IG)** should be **progressively reduced within two years**.
4. The Centre's review petition against the judgment was **dismissed in October 2025**.

Reasons behind Government Supporting IPS Deputation

1. The Ministry of Home Affairs argued that CAPFs perform an important **operational role** and cannot simply be treated like ordinary civilian Group A services.
2. According to the government, IPS officers provide an **institutional link between the Centre and State police establishments**, particularly when CAPFs are deployed in States.
3. The Supreme Court therefore **did not completely abolish IPS deputation**. Instead, it sought to balance operational requirements with the career interests of CAPF cadre officers.
4. CAPF officers, however, argue that personnel with decades of experience in **unit command and conflict areas** should not find senior positions in their own organisations substantially closed to them.
5. There is also a paradox: the Centre itself has faced difficulty in filling IPS-deputation posts because **States are sometimes reluctant to release IPS officers for central deputation**.

About Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Act, 2026

1. **The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill** was introduced on **March 25, 2026**, passed by **both Houses in April**, and became law.
2. The Act creates an **umbrella framework for Group A officers of the five CAPFs**.
3. It empowers the Central Government to frame rules relating to **recruitment, promotion, deputation and service conditions**.
4. Significantly, the rule-making power operates **notwithstanding an inconsistent judgment, decree or court order**, and rules framed under the Act prevail over inconsistent rules or government orders.
5. **Features of the act:**
 - a. The Act **retains a significant role for deputation at senior levels:**
 - i. **50% of IG posts** are to be filled through deputation.
 - ii. **At least 67% of Additional DG posts** are to be filled through deputation.
 - iii. **All Special DG and DG posts** are to be filled through deputation.
 - b. The government argues that this framework is necessary for **uniform administration of the five forces, operational requirements and Centre-State coordination**.
 - c. Opposition MPs, however, argued that the legislation effectively seeks to **overcome the Supreme Court's 2025 judgment** and perpetuate the disadvantage faced by CAPF cadre officers.
 - d. They demanded reference of the Bill to a **Select Committee** and walked out during its passage in Parliament.

Present Legal Position

1. CAPF officers have separately **challenged the 2026 Act in the Supreme Court**.
2. There are consequently **two overlapping proceedings:**
 - a. Contempt petitions concerning alleged non-compliance with the **2025 Supreme Court judgment**.
 - b. A challenge to the **2026 CAPF Act**, which subsequently changed the statutory framework.
3. The controversy also came into focus when contempt petitions listed before the Supreme Court were struck off and later placed before a specially constituted bench.
4. The **Registry stated that the Centre had requested that the contempt cases be heard along with the challenge to the new CAPF law** because the government's defence in both matters overlapped.

Conclusion: The CAPF-IPS dispute is fundamentally a question of **balancing institutional experience, fair career progression and operational requirements**. While IPS deputation may serve the objective of Centre-State coordination and operational flexibility, excessive deputation can create stagnation within the permanent CAPF cadres. A sustainable solution should therefore ensure **fair promotional opportunities for CAPF officers, effective cadre management and recruitment rules, while retaining only such deputation as is genuinely required for operational and administrative purposes**.

Question: Discuss the issue of senior leadership in CAPFs in light of the Supreme Court's 2025 judgment and the CAPF (General Administration) Act, 2026.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Rethinking rural cooperatives

Source: The post "Rethinking rural cooperatives" has been created based on "Rethinking rural cooperatives" published in "Indian Express" on 5th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3- Indian Economy

Context: The cooperative sector has received renewed policy attention through initiatives such as **Bharat Taxi**, new Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) and primary milk cooperatives. However, changing rural financial needs and the consolidation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) make it necessary to **rethink the structure of grassroots rural cooperatives**.

Evolution of Rural Credit

1. The **All-India Rural Credit Survey Committee (1956)** advocated decentralised, village-level financial institutions to provide rural credit.
2. **Primary cooperatives** constituted the first major phase of formalisation of rural credit.
3. Subsequently, **nationalised banks**, supported by branch-licensing requirements and priority-sector lending, expanded into rural areas.
4. This was followed by **Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)**, which were intended to combine professional banking with a local focus.

Present status of the cooperatives in India

1. At their peak, India had **more than 1 lakh primary credit cooperatives**, although only around 60% were estimated to be active.
2. Today, approximately **40,000–50,000 primary cooperatives** may be active, although there is no clear current estimate after NABARD stopped regularly publishing comprehensive statistics on rural credit and non-credit cooperatives.
3. RRBs have undergone **consolidation**, while amendments to the RRB Act have enabled **private-sector shareholding**.
4. Increasing commercial imperatives of RRBs may gradually move them away from their original focused rural-development agenda.
5. Therefore, **hyper-local primary cooperatives remain important** for reaching people, particularly the last woman in the remotest village.

Major Problems with Rural Cooperatives

1. Rural cooperatives are **vulnerable and can fail easily** because they have traditionally been structured mainly as credit institutions.
2. They are highly **leveraged**, while their members can simultaneously be borrowers, creating governance and financial risks.
3. Their loan portfolios are often excessively concentrated in **agriculture**, creating portfolio concentration risk.
4. Their geographical concentration exposes them to **covariance risk**, where events such as natural disasters can simultaneously affect many borrowers.
5. Primary cooperatives depend heavily on **refinancing from District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs)**.
6. Many DCCBs themselves depend on **State Cooperative Banks**, which ultimately rely on **NABARD refinancing**.
7. Thus, weaknesses at one level can transmit throughout the entire cooperative credit structure.

Lessons from Successful Models

1. Successful models in **Maharashtra, Kerala, Coastal Karnataka, parts of West Bengal and Telangana** show that rural cooperatives can become more resilient by **diversifying their balance sheets**.
2. Many successful primary cooperatives accept **local deposits**, thereby creating local financial participation and a stronger stake in the institution.
3. They also undertake **non-credit trading activities**, which diversify their income and provide a buffer during years of financial stress.

Proposed Reforms

1. **Integrating the middle tier:** District-level cooperative banks should be integrated with State Cooperative Banks because, in an interconnected financial system, the middle tier may add significant overhead without providing equivalent value.
2. **Specialised Regional Banks (SRBs):** The integrated institution should function as a professionally managed **Specialised Regional Bank**, rather than being managed purely according to traditional cooperative principles.
 - a. SRBs should focus their asset book on **cooperatives** and provide financing to the entire cooperative structure, covering both credit and non-credit activities.
3. **Ownership of SRBs:** Shares should be held only by cooperatives and cooperative-like institutions, including **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** and other local institutions.
4. **Professional governance:** Governance should not strictly follow the cooperative principle of “**one person/institution, one vote**”. Instead, RBI norms, including **independence and fit-and-proper requirements**, should guide management.
5. **Reduce excessive leverage:** Refinancing provided by SRBs to primary cooperatives should gradually be reduced to around **six times their member share capital and eligible non-withdrawable deposits**, subject to appropriate tenor conditions.
6. **Encourage local deposits:** Primary cooperatives should increase their reliance on **local deposits** rather than excessive external refinancing.
7. **Diversify activities:** Primary cooperatives should undertake **non-credit activities** to diversify income and strengthen their balance sheets.

8. **Modern banking facilities:** Strong primary cooperatives meeting financial conditions could access services such as **remittances, interoperability, UPI, debit cards and credit cards** for their members under a common brand.
 - a. Such modern banking facilities could be **mapped to the balance sheet of the SRB**, providing technological and financial support to grassroots institutions.
9. **Government support:** Union or State Governments may provide a **one-time grant to viable active cooperatives** for revival.
 - a. Cooperatives that are **beyond revival** could instead be replaced or restructured through new grassroots cooperatives involving local communities and linking them with activities such as **milk production and local payment systems**.

Way Forward

1. India needs to move beyond excessive concentration on **apex and elite financial institutions** and strengthen grassroots institutions.
2. The consolidation and commercialisation of RRBs make it even more important to preserve **hyper-local financial institutions**.
3. Modern financial technology and infrastructure now provide the capacity to improve the **housekeeping, payments and banking operations** of grassroots cooperatives.

Conclusion: India needs **vibrant, self-governed and financially responsible grassroots cooperatives** that combine local participation with professional governance. Strengthening primary cooperatives through **diversification, local deposits, reduced leverage, integrated banking support and modern digital services** can ensure that rural finance continues to reach the most remote sections of society.

Question: Rural cooperatives can play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive and decentralised financial development in India. Discuss.

Source: [Business Standard](#)

Outbound force: On the U.S. leaving Iraq

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

The United States invaded Iraq in 2003 to remove Saddam Hussein and eliminate alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), but the intervention produced prolonged conflict, sectarian violence and stronger Iranian influence. After withdrawing in 2011, U.S. forces returned in 2014 against Islamic State. Their final departure on September 30, 2026 ends a 23-year military involvement, while leaving Iraq responsible for managing serious security challenges. The final exit raises a central question: whether Iraqi institutions can preserve security while limiting outside influence.

From Regime Change to Prolonged Military Engagement

1. **2003 invasion and regime change:** U.S. forces invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein and remove alleged weapons of mass destruction, which later proved nonexistent.

2. **Collapse of the Ba'athist state:** The destruction of Saddam's political order weakened existing state structures and helped deepen social and sectarian divisions across Iraq.
3. **Sectarian conflict and human cost:** The rise of Shia political forces and insurgency triggered a deadly civil war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.
4. **Growth of jihadist groups:** Al-Qaeda developed a violent branch in post-war Iraq, which later transformed into Islamic State and expanded across the region.
5. **Islamic State's territorial rise:** At its height, Islamic State controlled about one-third of Iraq and killed thousands, making its defeat a major security priority.
6. **Heavy American losses:** Operation Iraqi Freedom caused nearly 4,500 American military deaths, around twice the number recorded in the parallel Afghanistan war.
7. **2011 withdrawal and 2014 return:** U.S. forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq in **2011**. The rise of **Islamic State and its capture of large parts of Iraq in 2014** led the U.S. to return and support Iraqi forces against the group.

The Transformation of Iraq's Strategic Landscape

1. **Rise of Iranian influence:** Saddam's removal ended Iraq's role as a buffer between Iran and Arab Gulf states, allowing Tehran to expand influence through Shia parties and militias.
2. **Popular Mobilisation Forces:** Iran-backed Shia militias formed the Popular Mobilisation Forces, which developed major political and security influence inside Iraq.
3. **Iraq as a U.S.-Iran arena:** Iraq maintained close political and military relations with both powers, while its territory increasingly became a setting for their confrontation.
4. **Soleimani's killing and retaliation:** The U.S. killing of Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020 intensified tensions, followed by repeated attacks on American bases by Iran's allies.
5. **Weak state and powerful militias:** Iraq is now left with a weak government facing powerful armed groups backed by a resurgent Iran, limiting the state's control over security.

Why the United States Is Leaving Iraq

1. **Defeat of Islamic State's territorial control:** Iraqi forces and the international coalition defeated Islamic State's territorial control by **2017**, reducing the need for a large foreign military presence.
2. **Transfer of security responsibility:** Years of coalition training and operations strengthened the Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Peshmerga, allowing them to take greater responsibility for national security.
3. **2024 withdrawal agreement:** The United States and Iraq agreed in **2024** to end the coalition's military mission and withdraw foreign forces by the end of September 2026.

4. **Unsustainable military presence:** Iran and its allies carried out at least **600 attacks** on U.S. military and diplomatic facilities in Iraq during the current regional war, increasing the risks of maintaining American forces.
5. **End of Operation Inherent Resolve:** The departure of U.S. and British forces ends the coalition's military mission against Islamic State in Iraq and shifts the security role to Iraqi institutions.

Iraq's Security Challenges After the Withdrawal

1. **Risk of greater Iranian influence:** The withdrawal removes a U.S. military presence that had acted as a counterweight to Tehran, potentially increasing Iran-backed groups' political and security influence.
2. **Militia challenge to state authority:** Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi has vowed to disarm Iranian-backed militias and bring weapons under state control, but powerful factions resist this effort.
3. **Threat of Islamic State resurgence:** Islamic State has lost its territorial caliphate but retains sleeper cells, creating a continuing threat during the security transition.
4. **Security gaps after U.S. exit:** Reduced access to American intelligence, logistics and drones could provide Islamic State with opportunities to regroup and exploit weaknesses.
5. **Drone attacks on Irbil:** Iranian-backed militias targeted the coalition base with up to **28 drones and missiles a day** during the regional war.
6. **Evidence of continuing militant capability:** Iraqi forces detected a suspected Islamic State suicide-attack plot around the withdrawal, showing that the group can still exploit security gaps.

A New Phase of Iraqi Sovereignty

1. **Iraqi-led security responsibility:** The withdrawal shifts primary responsibility for Iraq's security and stability to Iraqi institutions after more than a decade of coalition operations.
2. **Broad domestic support for sovereignty:** The departure is broadly popular among Iraqis because full national sovereignty remains a widely shared objective.
3. **Fear of a security vacuum:** Some Iraqi security figures believe the country is not fully ready to manage the security file alone and fear a vacuum after withdrawal.
4. **Continued U.S. support:** Following its military withdrawal from Iraq, the United States will continue providing targeted training and intelligence support to Iraqi forces.

Broader Strategic Implications for West Asia

1. **Iraqi responsibility for security:** The withdrawal places primary responsibility for Iraq's security and stability on its own institutions after years of coalition operations.
2. **Sovereignty versus security:** Although the departure is broadly popular among Iraqis, some security figures fear that the exit could create a security vacuum.

3. **Continued U.S. support:** Following its military withdrawal, the United States will continue providing targeted training and intelligence support to Iraqi partners.
4. **Iran's strategic gain:** Iran and its allied groups see the U.S. departure as a victory because it removes an important military counterweight to Tehran's influence.
5. **Limits of U.S. intervention:** Iraq shows how regime change and prolonged military intervention can produce instability, strengthen militias and expose the limits of American power.
6. **Iraq's balancing role:** Iraq's ability to maintain relations with both the United States and Iran will remain important amid continuing regional rivalry.

Conclusion

The U.S. withdrawal ends a military engagement that began with the 2003 invasion, but it does not end Iraq's security challenges. Iraq must strengthen state control over armed groups, prevent Islamic State's return, balance relations with Iran and the U.S., and protect its sovereignty. The success of withdrawal will depend on Iraq's ability to manage these pressures.

Question for practice:

Discuss the reasons for the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and its implications for Iraq's security and regional stability.

Source: [The Hindu](#); [BBC](#)

How Regulation Stifles HEIs

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

Introduction

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) need regulation to ensure quality, accountability and minimum standards. However, excessive supervision can shift focus from teaching and research to compliance, documentation and accreditation. This can weaken internal integrity, discourage academic innovation and create risk-averse behaviour. The **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025** seeks to restructure higher education regulation across India, making it important to balance regulatory oversight with institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Current Status of Higher Educational Institutions in India

1. **Existing Regulatory Architecture:** The University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and NAAC form important parts of the existing regulatory and accreditation system.
2. **Compliance-Driven Culture:** Institutions may focus on prescribed norms, annual self-assessment reports and inspection evidence instead of improving classroom engagement, teaching and scholarship.

3. **Paper and Evidence Burden:** Digital documentation has created an “**evidence blizzard**”, where institutions collect proof for regulatory requirements rather than demonstrate actual learning.
4. **Regulatory Inconsistencies:** Different regulations, circulars and guidelines can contain inconsistencies, leading to repeated clarifications and additional administrative requirements.
5. **Academic Work as Arithmetic:** The **UGC's 2018 regulation** combines a 40-hour working week with five hours of daily campus presence, risking mechanical measurement of academic work.
6. **Surveillance and Risk Aversion:** Regulatory surveillance can create a trust deficit, making teachers and institutions avoid experimentation because conventional practices appear safer.
7. **Autonomy and Quality:** **Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs)** enjoy greater freedom in curriculum, recruitment and resource allocation.

Proposed Regulatory Reform

1. **Unified Regulatory Body:** The **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA) Bill, 2025** proposes replacing UGC, AICTE and NCTE with one apex body, while medicine, law and architecture remain separately regulated.
2. **Legislative Status:** The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on **15 December 2025** and referred to a **31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** for review.
3. **NEP 2020 Alignment:** The Bill seeks to operationalise the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** vision of a unified higher education regulator.
4. **Three-Council Structure:** The Regulatory Council will oversee institutional entry, the Accreditation Council will independently assess quality, and the Standards Council will set minimum academic standards.
5. **Digital Approvals:** Institutions can seek online, paperless approvals based on land, funding, faculty and infrastructure conditions, reducing delays and discretionary decision-making.
6. **Graded Autonomy:** Better-performing institutions will receive greater freedom over curriculum, fees and international collaborations, although the Bill does not clearly define performance measurement.
7. **Flexible Academic Pathways:** The **National Academic Credit Bank (NACB)** will store credits for seven years, allowing certificates after one year, diplomas after two years, and degrees after three or four years.
8. **Employability and Internationalisation:** Six-month internships, industry professionals as faculty, top-500 foreign university campuses and IIT-IIM centres abroad aim to strengthen practical and global exposure.

Major Concerns

1. **Centralisation of Power:** A single apex regulator may concentrate significant authority and raise concerns about political interference without strong independence safeguards.
2. **Federalism and State Autonomy:** Education is on the **Concurrent List**, yet states may have limited influence over decisions affecting their publicly funded universities.
3. **Scale and Diversity:** One regulator would oversee about **1,100 universities and over 43,000 colleges** with different languages, funding models and regional conditions.
4. **Regulatory Overload:** Replacing several regulators with one overarching body may preserve the compliance-driven approach if inspection remains the main measure of quality.
5. **Unclear Performance Criteria:** Graded autonomy and funding depend on performance, but the Bill does not clearly establish how institutional performance will be measured.
6. **Performance-Linked Funding:** Linking **30% of government funding** to employment and research outcomes may disadvantage universities serving poorer or remote regions.
7. **Commercialisation Risk:** Foreign university profit repatriation and relaxed faculty qualification rules may encourage revenue-driven education, especially where public universities remain underfunded.
8. **Digital Inequality:** Digital-only regulation may exclude institutions and students in rural and tribal areas where reliable internet access remains limited.

Way Forward

1. **Meaningful State Participation:** The JPC should create a formal consultative mechanism that gives states real input into decisions affecting their universities.
2. **Protect Academic Freedom:** The framework should safeguard research, curriculum and faculty appointments from regulatory interference for non-academic reasons.
3. **Independent Accreditation:** Accreditation should remain separate from licensing so that quality assessment remains independent from institutional approval.
4. **Clarify Funding Arrangements:** The Bill should clearly specify how state universities will be funded during and after the regulatory transition.
5. **Build Internship Capacity:** Quality internship and apprenticeship opportunities should be developed before making the six-month requirement compulsory for all undergraduates.
6. **Strengthen Digital Infrastructure:** Digital regulation should expand alongside reliable internet access, especially in rural and tribal areas.
7. **Contextualise Performance Funding:** Funding indicators should consider socioeconomic and regional conditions so institutions serving disadvantaged students are not unfairly penalised.

8. **Increase Public Investment:** Regulatory reform should be matched with adequate public funding because regulation alone cannot revive chronically underfunded public universities.

Conclusion

Regulation should ensure quality and accountability without turning higher education into a compliance exercise. The VBSA framework must balance institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equity and cooperative federalism. Its success will depend on independent regulation, adequate public funding, State participation and context-sensitive implementation. The ultimate goal should be HEIs that promote teaching, research, innovation and knowledge creation for society.

Question for practice:

Evaluate whether the VBSA Bill, 2025 can improve the quality of higher education without undermining institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Disabled citizens and the future of AI

Source: The post “Disabled citizens and the future of AI” has been created based on “Disabled citizens and the future of AI” published in “The Hindu” on 6th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used in government services, recruitment and healthcare. For persons with disabilities, it can provide greater independence, but its benefits will not automatically reach them unless accessibility and disability inclusion are made integral to AI development.

Opportunities of AI for Persons with Disabilities

1. **Greater independence:** AI can help persons with disabilities perform everyday tasks without depending entirely on others. For example, AI can help a visually impaired person read documents, understand photographs and access government forms.
2. **Improved assistive technologies:** AI can improve mobility by identifying accessible routes and can support communication through **eye-tracking and voice-recognition technologies**.
3. **Better access to information and education:** Speech-to-text software, automatically generated captions, image descriptions and digital assistants can make information more accessible.
4. **Support in communication:** AI can enable communication through technologies such as sign-language avatars and other assistive tools.
5. **Support for independent living:** AI-enabled systems can address individual needs and expand the possibilities for persons with disabilities to live independently.

Major concerns

1. **Late inclusion:** Persons with disabilities are being brought into the AI conversation only after AI systems are already being developed.

2. **Poor accessibility:** Many government websites and apps remain inaccessible to disabled citizens. Although the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** required accessible digital services from 2019, compliance remains an exception.
3. **Weak implementation of accessibility rules:** In the November **2024 Rajive Raturi judgment**, the Supreme Court held that accessibility is a facet of the fundamental right to life and dignity. It also noted that accessibility rules had remained largely toothless.
4. **Inherent AI bias:** Research involving 21 language models showed that disability-related inputs made models more error-prone, negative in tone and more likely to stereotype.
5. **Poor representation in datasets:** The CLIP image model was 15 percentage points less accurate on photographs taken by blind and low-vision users. Objects important to disabled lives, such as white canes and Braille displays, appeared up to 17 times less often in training datasets.
6. **Risk of discriminatory responses:** AI systems may give inappropriate responses when users disclose their disability.
7. **Lack of human fallback:** A survey of 2,462 users of the NClude platform found that only 543 users completed previously closed tasks through AI alone, while others needed staff assistance.
8. **Energy and infrastructure concerns:** India's growing data-centre capacity will increase electricity and grid requirements. Power cuts can seriously affect persons dependent on powered wheelchairs, oxygen machines and other essential equipment.

Way Forward

1. **Every government AI system should be tested for disability bias.**
2. **Training datasets should contain genuine disability representation and should be gathered with consent.**
3. **AI systems should have human fallback mechanisms** so that users are not left helpless when technology fails.
4. **Government websites and apps must be made accessible** instead of treating accessibility as an exception.
5. **Data centres should adopt renewable energy and consider their impact on electricity grids and heat.**
6. **Persons with disabilities must have a voice** in deciding the future of AI, including the data used to train models and the infrastructure supporting them.

Conclusion: AI should **empower persons with disabilities rather than make them surrender existing tools in the name of technological progress**. Their participation, genuine representation in datasets, accessible digital services and protection from disability bias are essential for an inclusive AI future.

Question: Artificial Intelligence has the potential to empower persons with disabilities, but its present development may also create new forms of exclusion. Discuss.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Why is Buxa bringing tigers back?

Source: The post “Why is Buxa bringing tigers back?” has been created based on “Why is Buxa bringing tigers back?” published in “The Hindu” on 6th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3-Environment

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Context: Tiger reintroduction is an important conservation strategy for restoring **ecologically viable and self-sustaining tiger populations** in suitable habitats. Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal has been selected for such an initiative because of its suitable habitat, strategic location and connectivity with important tiger landscapes.

About Buxa Tiger Reserve

1. Buxa Tiger Reserve is situated in the **Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal**.
2. It is **located at the confluence of three major bio-geographic zones**: The lower Gangetic plains, Central Himalayas and the Brahmaputra valley.
3. It has corridor connectivity **across the border with the forests of Bhutan in the North, on the East it has linkages with the Kochugaon forests, Manas Tiger Reserve and on the West with the Jaldapara National Park**.
 - a. Important corridors are **Buxa-Chilapata Corridor, Buxa-Titi Corridor and Buxa-Ripu Corridor**.
4. It was declared a tiger reserve in **1983** and is the **15th tiger reserve of India**.
5. It covers about **760.87 sq. km** and is connected with the **forests of Bhutan, Manas Tiger Reserve and Jaldapara National Park**.
6. It is **crossed by major rivers like the Sankosh, Raidak, Jayanti, and Dima**.
7. It is covered mainly by **moist tropical forests**.

Reason behind selecting Buxa Tiger reserve for Tiger reintroduction

1. Buxa Tiger Reserve historically supported tigers, but their population declined due to **habitat degradation, fragmentation, changes in land use and reduced prey availability**.
2. The reserve **forms an important part of the larger landscape connecting tiger habitats across the India-Bhutan region**.
3. A recent assessment found that there were **no resident tigers in Buxa**, making reintroduction necessary for restoring the population.

Process of Reintroducing Tig

1. A **three-year-old tigress, T138**, was released from **Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar** into Buxa.
2. Initially, the tiger will be kept in an enclosure for about **2-3 months** to acclimatise to the new environment.
3. It will subsequently be released into the wider reserve.
4. **Radio/telemetry monitoring, camera traps and field-based monitoring** will be used to track movement, adaptation and behaviour.
 - a. Further releases are planned to establish a **breeding population**.
5. Valmiki Tiger Reserve was considered suitable for bringing the tigress because it shares similarities with Buxa in terms of **habitat and terrain**.
6. However, the experience also highlights that translocation must consider ecological compatibility, as an earlier attempt to move a tiger from the **Sundarbans to Buxa** was unsuccessful.

Experience of tiger reintroduction in India

1. Tiger reintroduction has been attempted in several Indian reserves.

- a. **Sariska and Panna** are important examples **where reintroduction programmes have helped restore tiger populations.**
 - b. These programmes involved cooperation between the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), State Governments and Wildlife Institute of India (WII).**
2. However, success has not been uniform, and some translocations have faced difficulties in adaptation and survival.

Major challenges

1. **Human settlements:** Several villages and human habitations occur within and around the reserve.
2. **Human-wildlife conflict:** The movement of tigers into human-dominated areas could increase conflict.
3. **Infrastructure:** Railways and roads passing through or near the landscape can fragment habitats and increase risks to wildlife.
4. **Commercial traffic:** Heavy traffic on roads connecting Bhutan and West Bengal poses an additional threat.
5. **Prey availability:** A sufficient prey base is essential for sustaining a tiger population.
6. **Habitat degradation:** Fragmentation and changes in land use can reduce the quality of the tiger habitat.
7. **Adaptation of translocated animals:** Tigers may face difficulties in adapting to a new environment, as demonstrated by unsuccessful translocation experiences.

Way Forward

1. **Scientific site assessment:** Before further releases, habitat quality, prey availability and carrying capacity should be assessed scientifically.
2. **Phased reintroduction:** Tigers should be released gradually, with adequate acclimatisation and post-release monitoring.
3. **Strengthen monitoring:** **Camera traps, telemetry and field surveillance** should be used continuously to track movement, survival and breeding.
4. **Improve prey base:** Habitat restoration and protection of prey species should receive priority.
5. **Reduce human-wildlife conflict:** Villages around the reserve should be involved through awareness, early-warning systems and timely compensation.
6. **Manage infrastructure:** Wildlife-friendly measures such as **animal passages and regulated traffic** should be adopted in vulnerable areas.
7. **Landscape-level conservation:** Cooperation with **Bhutan and neighbouring protected areas** should be strengthened to maintain wildlife corridors.
8. **Adaptive management:** The NTCA, WII and State authorities should regularly evaluate the programme and modify the strategy based on field evidence.

Conclusion: The reintroduction of tigers in Buxa can restore an important **tiger population and strengthen the India-Bhutan conservation landscape.** However, its success will depend not merely on releasing tigers but on ensuring **adequate habitat, prey availability, scientific monitoring, community participation and effective management of human-wildlife conflict.**

Question: What is the significance of tiger reintroduction and translocation as a wildlife conservation strategy in India? Discuss the major challenges associated with such programmes and suggest suitable measures for their effective implementation.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Looming Crisis of World Unemployment

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper3 - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Introduction

The world is approaching a major employment challenge as developing countries add a large number of young workers while job creation remains insufficient. Over the coming decade, the gap between new labour-market entrants and available jobs could weaken the demographic dividend, increase social pressures and deepen migration. India faces this challenge directly because its large young workforce needs enough productive, labour-absorbing employment opportunities.

Current Situation: The Growing Global Employment Gap

1. **Massive job deficit:** Over the coming decade, **1.2 billion young people** in the Global South will reach working age, against only **400 million projected jobs**.
2. **800 million opportunity gap:** The resulting **800 million shortfall** could turn the world's largest potential demographic advantage into a major source of economic and social instability.
3. **Failure of the traditional model:** The demographic dividend once supported higher productivity, savings and capital formation, as seen in the **East Asian economic miracle**.
4. **Weak labour absorption:** Developing economies are struggling because domestic markets, infrastructure and institutions cannot absorb new workers as quickly as populations are expanding.
5. **Stalling economic mobility:** Traditional pathways from low-income agriculture to productive urban employment are weakening, making it harder for young workers to move into better-paid activities.
6. **Narrow demographic window:** The employment opportunity is temporary, making timely job creation essential before the working-age advantage begins to weaken in many countries.

Causes: Why Is Job Creation Falling Behind?

1. **Premature deindustrialisation:** Automation, robotics and advanced industrial software are reducing manufacturing jobs before developing countries reach the industrial income levels of earlier economies.
2. **Loss of manufacturing's traditional role:** Light manufacturing once absorbed large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, but its ability to provide this employment bridge has weakened.
3. **Changing skill demand:** The global economy increasingly rewards **high-skilled, technology-driven labour**, while many young people lack quality vocational training, tertiary education and digital infrastructure.
4. **Weak private-sector environment:** High capital costs, unstable regulations and taxation problems restrict entrepreneurs from starting, expanding and hiring through small and medium-sized enterprises.

5. **Limited long-term investment:** Complex legal systems and weak property rights discourage long-term foreign investment and push capital towards speculative rather than employment-generating activities.
6. **Infrastructure constraints:** Power failures, poor roads and port congestion raise business costs, limiting the ability of small firms to compete in domestic and global markets.

India's Employment Challenge

1. **Large working-age population:** India adds millions of young people to its workforce each year and has a **median age below 30**, creating a major but time-bound opportunity.
2. **Growth without enough jobs:** India has struggled to match its economic growth with sufficient employment creation, making job generation central to its demographic transition.
3. **Skill-market mismatch:** India must better connect workforce skills with market needs, as skill mismatch remains an immediate employment challenge.
4. **Persistent underemployment:** A large workforce does not automatically ensure productive livelihoods, making labour-absorbing value creation necessary during the shrinking demographic window.
5. **Low female participation:** Low female labour-force participation limits the effective use of India's growing human-resource potential.
6. **Agriculture's employment burden:** Agriculture still absorbs **nearly half the population** while contributing only **16% of GDP in FY24**, showing the need for more productive employment opportunities.

Consequences: From Demographic Dividend to Demographic Crisis

1. **Youth frustration and distrust:** Prolonged exclusion from productive economic life can weaken trust in governments and increase frustration among young people.
2. **Social and political instability:** Unemployment can fuel **social polarisation, criminal activity, extremist ideologies and civil unrest**, threatening social stability.
3. **Rising migration pressure:** Lack of livelihoods in the Global South can increase forced migration towards the Global North and intensify political tensions.
4. **Wider global tensions:** Employment failure in developing countries can create cross-border pressures, making domestic job creation an increasingly important global stability issue.
5. **Lost demographic opportunity:** Without productive employment, large young populations may become a source of instability instead of generating productivity, savings and development.

Way Forward

1. **Private-sector-led job creation:** Governments should unlock private capital and create conditions where **small and medium-sized enterprises** can start, expand and generate employment.
2. **Institutional and regulatory reform:** Simpler regulations, transparent governance and stronger institutional integrity can reduce barriers that restrict enterprise and investment.
3. **Better infrastructure:** Modern physical and digital infrastructure can create jobs during construction while reducing business costs and improving participation in supply chains.
4. **Agriculture and rural value chains:** High-value farming, agri-tech, cold chains, food processing and climate-resilient agriculture can create remunerative rural employment and reduce distress migration.
5. **Health and care economy:** Expanding healthcare, nursing, community health and elder care can create non-outsourcable jobs, especially for young women, while strengthening human capital.
6. **Tourism and cultural economy:** Sustainable tourism can generate decentralised employment for transport providers, hospitality workers and artisans because it remains labour-intensive.
7. **Green and modern manufacturing:** Solar components, electric two-wheelers, energy-efficient materials, light assembly and decentralised production can absorb labour when combined with agile skill-building.
8. **International cooperation:** Developed economies and multilateral institutions should provide affordable long-term finance and technology transfers, while developing countries pursue institutional reforms.

Conclusion

A young population becomes a demographic dividend only when economies create enough productive jobs. The global response must combine private investment, skills, infrastructure, institutional reform and labour-intensive sectors. For India, timely action is essential to use its shrinking demographic window, expand productive employment and prevent demographic potential from becoming a source of persistent unemployment and instability.

Question for practice:

Examine the emerging global employment crisis, its causes and consequences, with special reference to India, and suggest measures to harness the demographic dividend.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Legislative Privileges Vs Free Speech

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Constitution of India

Introduction

Legislative privileges are special powers and immunities given to Parliament and State Legislatures to ensure their independent functioning. The constitutional issue arises when these privileges are used against **citizens, journalists or critics**, potentially affecting their fundamental rights, especially **freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a)**. On **6 October 2026**, the Supreme Court closed the long-pending seven-judge reference after the 2003 Tamil Nadu Assembly resolution was withdrawn. The larger constitutional questions therefore remain open for future consideration.

What are Legislative Privileges?

1. **Purpose of privileges:** Legislative privileges protect the **free and independent functioning of legislatures** by preventing external obstruction during their proceedings.
2. **Constitutional basis:** **Articles 105 and 194** provide privileges and immunities to Parliament and State Legislatures respectively, including protections necessary for legislative functioning.
3. **Privileges against non-members:** These powers can be exercised against **non-members**, including citizens, journalists and others, when their actions are treated as breaches of legislative privilege.
4. **State-specific framework:** Under **Article 194(3)**, a State Legislature can define its privileges through law; otherwise, the constitutional provision determines their applicable scope.

Why is there a Conflict with Free Speech?

1. **Freedom of speech:** **Article 19(1)(a)** protects freedom of speech and expression, including the press's ability to report and comment on legislative affairs.
2. **Personal liberty:** **Article 21** becomes important when legislative privilege results in the **arrest or imprisonment of citizens**, as such action directly affects personal liberty.
3. **Equality and fairness:** **Article 14** requires legislative action affecting individuals to satisfy constitutional standards of **fairness and non-arbitrariness**.
4. **Competing constitutional interests:** The central issue is whether privileges under **Articles 105 and 194** can override fundamental rights when exercised against speech outside the House.
5. **Purpose versus misuse:** Petitioners argue that privileges should protect **legislative functioning**, not protect governments, political parties or individual legislators from legitimate public scrutiny.

How did the Issue Arise? — 2003 Tamil Nadu Case

1. **Triggering dispute:** In 2003, *The Hindu* published reports on Tamil Nadu Assembly proceedings and an editorial criticising the functioning of the government led by **J. Jayalalithaa**.
2. **Privilege proceedings:** The Tamil Nadu Assembly treated the publications as **breach of privilege and contempt of the House**, leading to action against senior journalists.
3. **Imprisonment order:** Five journalists of *The Hindu* and the editor of *Murasoli* were sentenced to **15 days' imprisonment**, with arrest warrants issued against them.

4. **Supreme Court intervention:** The journalists approached the Supreme Court, which **stayed their arrest** and found that the matter raised wider constitutional questions requiring consideration by a larger Bench.
5. **Long constitutional dispute:** The case eventually raised the broader question of how far legislative privilege can operate when it conflicts with **fundamental rights of citizens outside the House**.

Why did the Supreme Court Need to Examine it?

1. **Searchlight Case, 1959:** In *M.S.M. Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha*, the Court held that legislative privilege could prevail over Article 19(1)(a) in matters concerning publication of legislative proceedings.
2. **Special Reference, 1964:** The Court later held that fundamental rights do **not automatically yield** to legislative privileges and recognised judicial examination of detention arising from privilege proceedings.
3. **Judicial review:** The 1964 decision also indicated that legislatures could not proceed against judges and lawyers merely for performing their **constitutional and professional duties**.
4. **Conflicting principles:** These judgments created uncertainty over whether legislative privileges enjoy priority over fundamental rights or remain subject to **constitutional limitations and judicial scrutiny**.
5. **Need for authoritative ruling:** The issue was therefore referred to larger Benches and eventually a **seven-judge Constitution Bench** for an authoritative interpretation.

Evolving Judicial Approach and Present Legal Position

1. **Functional approach:** In *Sita Soren (2024)*, the Supreme Court held that legislative privileges must have a **functional relationship with the legitimate duties of the House**, rather than operate as personal immunities.
2. **Limits on immunity:** The Court held that parliamentary immunity cannot protect **bribery**, because accepting a bribe is separate from legitimate legislative functioning.
3. **Relevance to free speech:** This functional approach supports the argument that legislative privilege cannot automatically become an **absolute shield against journalists, citizens or public critics**.
4. **Withdrawal of the 2003 resolution:** The Tamil Nadu Assembly had **withdrawn its 7 November 2003 resolution on 30 July 2004**. This subsequent development was not specifically brought to the Supreme Court's notice when the matter was referred to the seven-judge Bench.
5. **Why the reference was closed:** When the matter came up on **6 October 2026**, the Court noted that the resolution forming the basis of the case had already been withdrawn. Since the **original cause of action no longer survived**, the Court closed the reference as **infructuous**.
6. **What remains unresolved:** The Supreme Court did **not decide the larger questions of law** concerning legislative privileges and fundamental rights, and kept them open for consideration in an appropriate future case.

Why Does the Issue Matter?

1. **Press freedom:** Excessive use of privilege against journalists can affect **independent reporting** and create fear around criticism of legislative functioning.
2. **Legislative accountability:** Legislatures perform public functions, so their proceedings and decisions remain important subjects of **public discussion and scrutiny**.
3. **Protection of citizens:** When privilege proceedings can result in arrest or imprisonment, clear constitutional safeguards are necessary to protect **personal liberty and fairness**.
4. **Balance of powers:** The issue requires a balance between **legislative autonomy and judicial review**, without allowing either institution to undermine the constitutional role of the other.
5. **Democratic functioning:** A clear legal framework can ensure that legislative privileges protect genuine legislative work while preserving **fundamental rights and democratic accountability**.

Conclusion

Legislative privileges are necessary to protect **independent legislative functioning**, but they should not become an unrestricted power against legitimate criticism. The **functional approach** provides a basis for balancing legislative autonomy with fundamental rights. A future constitutional ruling should clearly define when privilege can operate against citizens, while protecting **free speech, press freedom, personal liberty and legislative accountability**.

Question for practice:

Discuss the constitutional conflict between legislative privileges and the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

Source: [Indian Express](#); [The Print](#)

Rewilding the Great Indian Bustard: Key Challenges

Source: The post “**Rewilding the Great Indian Bustard: Key Challenges**” has been created based on “**Rewilding the Great Indian Bustard: Key Challenges**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 7th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-3- Environment

Context: October 4 was a major milestone in the conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), as two captive-bred male birds were released into the wild for the first time in Rajasthan’s Desert National Park near Jaisalmer.

About Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

1. The Great Indian Bustard (GIB) is a **critically endangered, large ground-dwelling bird** found in savannahs, grasslands and deserts.

2. It is **endemic to the Indian subcontinent**.
3. It is found in **Rajasthan (Desert National park), Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh** in India and parts of Pakistan.
4. Its population has declined from an estimated **1,260–1,400 in the early 1970s to around 150 today**, making its conservation an urgent priority.

Significance of the Rewilding Initiative

1. **First captive-to-wild release:** On October 4, 2026, two captive-bred male GIBs were released into the wild in Rajasthan's **Desert National Park (DNP)**, marking the first pilot rewilding effort.
2. **Part of Project GIB:** The initiative is being undertaken by the **Centre, Wildlife Institute of India, and the governments of Rajasthan and Gujarat** as part of long-term conservation efforts.
3. **Conservation breeding:** Since 2019, wild GIB eggs have been collected, artificially incubated and hand-reared at centres in Rajasthan. These efforts have resulted in the birth of **98 birds so far**.
4. **Scientific rewilding:** Rewilding aviaries and soft-release facilities have been developed to allow young birds to adapt to natural conditions and reduce human imprinting.
5. **Technology-based monitoring:** The released birds have been fitted with transmitters that provide information on their **location and movement patterns**, allowing scientists to monitor their adaptation and survival.
6. **Scope for replication:** If successful, the Rajasthan experiment can provide valuable lessons for similar conservation efforts in other range states such as **Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh**.

Challenges to Long-term Recovery

1. **Habitat loss:** Conversion of open grasslands into croplands, mining areas and other land uses has considerably reduced suitable GIB habitats.
2. **Power-line collisions:** GIBs have poor frontal vision and heavy bodies, making it difficult for them to detect and avoid power lines. Collisions with renewable-energy infrastructure have therefore become a major threat.
3. **Weak protection of grasslands:** Unlike forests, grasslands are often not perceived as important protected ecosystems and remain vulnerable to degradation and conversion.
4. **Unsuitable afforestation:** Planting trees in natural grasslands can alter the open habitat required by GIBs. Experts have also warned against treating grasslands as degraded land that needs to be converted into forests.
5. **Mining pressure:** Limestone mining threatens the open and flat landscapes essential for GIBs. Proposed mining operations in the northern part of DNP are a concern.
6. **Livelihood concerns:** Grassland degradation and conservation measures also affect **pastoralists and livestock-rearing communities**, making community participation important.
7. **Need for power-line mitigation:** The Supreme Court has identified **14,013 sq km in Rajasthan and 740 sq km in Gujarat as GIB priority areas** and ordered **80 km of power lines in Rajasthan to be buried underground by 2027–28**. Delays in implementing these measures could undermine rewilding efforts.
8. **Small and fragmented population:** With only around **150 GIBs remaining in the wild**, the populations outside Rajasthan, including those in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, face the risk of local extinction.

Way Forward

1. **Protect and restore grasslands** by preventing their conversion into croplands, mining areas and other incompatible land uses.
2. **Complete power-line mitigation measures** by undergrounding identified lines and developing designated power-line corridors.
3. **Expand scientific rewilding** after carefully evaluating the survival and adaptation of the birds released in Rajasthan.
4. **Improve habitats in other range states** before undertaking similar reintroduction programmes in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
5. **Avoid inappropriate afforestation** in natural grasslands and recognise grasslands as valuable ecosystems in their own right.
6. **Regulate mining activities** in critical GIB habitats to maintain the open landscapes required by the species.
7. **Strengthen scientific monitoring** through transmitters and regular tracking of released birds to assess their movement, survival and adaptation.
8. **Involve local communities and pastoralists** in grassland conservation so that ecological protection is balanced with livelihood requirements.
9. **Adopt a landscape-level conservation approach** by protecting the bird, its habitat and the ecological conditions necessary for its long-term survival.

Conclusion: The release of captive-bred Great Indian Bustards is a **significant first step in rewilding the species**, but captive breeding alone cannot ensure its recovery. The success of the programme will ultimately depend on **protecting and restoring grasslands, reducing power-line collisions, regulating mining and involving local communities**. Therefore, rewilding must be integrated with **long-term habitat and ecosystem conservation** to secure the future of the Great Indian Bustard.

Question: The rewilding of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) marks an important step towards conserving India's critically endangered grassland bird. Discuss the significance of this initiative and examine the major challenges in its long-term recovery.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Break the chain: On leprosy in India

Source: The post "Break the chain: On leprosy in India" has been created based on "Break the chain: On leprosy in India" published in "The Hindu" on 7th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: India brought the prevalence of leprosy below **1 case per 10,000 population by 2005**, after which the WHO declared it eliminated as a public health problem. However, continued transmission, childhood cases and disability show that elimination at the national level has not meant complete interruption of transmission.

About Leprosy

1. Leprosy is a **chronic neuro-muscular disorder**.
2. It is also known as **Hansen's disease**.
3. It is **caused by several strains of Mycobacterium leprae**.
4. It primarily **affects the skin and peripheral nerves** (the nerves outside the brain and spinal cord).

5. It has a **long incubation period** which **makes detection difficult**.
6. It **can be cured with Multi-Drug Therapy(MDT)**.

Present Status

1. The prevalence of leprosy among **adults and children and the Grade-2 Disability (G2D) rate** have **declined** over the last decade, but transmission continues in several pockets.
2. India accounted for around **46% of all leprosy cases reported among children globally in 2025**, making childhood transmission a major concern.
3. Only **148 districts** have achieved 'interruption of transmission', against the projected **300 districts**.
4. The disease burden is unevenly distributed, with **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra** accounting for disproportionate shares.
5. In 2025-26, more than **70 crore people were screened** in highly endemic areas. Around **24,367 cases** were detected through this exercise, while ASHA workers identified nearly **40 lakh suspected cases** and **48,027 cases were confirmed**.
6. Single-dose **rifampicin post-exposure prophylaxis** was administered to **91.1% of the 16.9 lakh eligible contacts**.
7. Despite these efforts, the 2025-26 report showed that overall incidence was **41% above projections**, childhood incidence was **91.6% above projections**, and the G2D rate was **34% above projections**.

Reasons for Persistent Transmission

1. **Complacency after elimination:** After WHO recognised **India as having eliminated leprosy as a public health problem in 2005**, surveillance was integrated into the general health system, weakening focused leprosy surveillance.
2. **Prevalence masking transmission:** Multi-drug treatment shortened the period for which patients remained officially registered. Consequently, prevalence declined even while transmission continued.
3. **Delayed diagnosis:** Stigma surrounding leprosy discourages people from seeking timely medical care, resulting in nerve damage and disability before treatment.
4. **Misdiagnosis:** Many healthcare practitioners are unfamiliar with leprosy pathology and may incorrectly treat it as an ordinary skin condition.
5. **Persistent stigma:** Social stigma contributes to concealment of disease and delays in diagnosis, thereby allowing transmission to continue.
6. **Geographical concentration:** Endemic pockets, particularly in certain States and districts, continue to sustain transmission.
7. **Inadequate focus on interruption of transmission:** A reduction in prevalence alone can give a misleading picture of progress if new infections continue to emerge.

Government Initiatives and Progress

1. **Door-to-door screening:** Rising disability in the early 2010s prompted intensified household-level screening.
2. **Post-exposure prophylaxis:** Single-dose rifampicin was administered to **91.1% of the 16.9 lakh people** identified as likely contacts in 2025-26.
3. **ASHA-based surveillance:** ASHA workers identified nearly **40 lakh suspected cases**, strengthening community-level detection.
4. **Digital surveillance:** The government has operationalised digital systems for better tracking and surveillance.

5. **Possible use of MIP vaccine:** The government is considering the use of the **MIP vaccine** to accelerate pathogen clearance in highly infectious patients.
6. **National Strategic Plan:** The **National Strategic Plan (NSP) and Roadmap for Leprosy 2023–2027** appropriately focuses on interrupting transmission, in line with the WHO approach.

Way Forward

1. **Prioritise interruption of transmission:** The government should treat interruption of transmission as the primary objective, rather than relying mainly on declining prevalence.
2. **Strengthen surveillance:** Dedicated surveillance should be strengthened in highly endemic districts and vulnerable communities.
3. **Ensure early diagnosis:** Door-to-door screening and active case detection should be intensified in areas where late diagnosis and transmission remain high.
4. **Focus on children:** Since childhood cases indicate recent transmission, children should receive special attention through systematic screening and contact tracing.
5. **Strengthen contact management:** Post-exposure prophylaxis and systematic monitoring of contacts should be expanded to prevent new infections.
6. **Improve healthcare capacity:** Medical practitioners and frontline health workers should be trained to recognise the clinical manifestations of leprosy and distinguish it from common skin conditions.
7. **Combat stigma:** Public awareness campaigns should emphasise that leprosy is **curable** and that early treatment can prevent disability, thereby encouraging people to seek care.
8. **Target high-burden areas:** Resources should be concentrated in States and social settings where transmission and late diagnosis remain persistent.
9. **Maintain ambitious targets:** The government should not dilute detection efforts or revise elimination targets merely to improve reported indicators. Instead, investments should be increased to meet the existing **2026–27 projections**.
10. **Use data-driven surveillance:** Digital surveillance should be used to identify transmission hotspots, monitor contacts and assess progress at the district level.

Conclusion: India's achievement of **elimination as a public health problem in 2005 was an important milestone, but it did not mean that transmission had stopped**. The reported overshooting of projections in 2025–26 — **overall incidence by 41%, childhood incidence by 91.6% and Grade-2 disability by 34%** — shows the need for renewed action. India must therefore “**break the chain**” of transmission through **early detection, contact management, stronger surveillance, better clinical capacity and reduction of stigma**, with interruption of transmission as the central goal of its leprosy strategy.

Question: Despite India achieving elimination of leprosy as a public health problem in 2005, its continued transmission remains a concern. Discuss the reasons for persistent transmission of leprosy in India and suggest measures to achieve the targets under the National Strategic Plan and Roadmap for Leprosy 2023–2027.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The China-U.S. Rapprochement

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

The **U.S. and China have intensified high-level engagement in 2026**, reflecting a shift towards managing tensions after years of strategic rivalry. Their engagement covers trade, technology, economic relations and wider geopolitical concerns. However, this rapprochement does not end competition over **global influence, advanced technology, military power and the future international order**. The key issue is whether rivalry can be managed without causing wider instability.

Current Status of the China-U.S. Rapprochement

1. **2026 summit diplomacy:** Beijing (May) and Washington (September) marked intensified leader-level engagement, while Shenzhen (November) and Miami (December) were planned as further meetings.
2. **Managed strategic competition:** The two powers are moving towards mechanisms that can manage competition within agreed limits without ending their broader strategic rivalry.
3. **Economic dialogue:** The **Bessent-He channel has held eight meetings**, roughly once every two months, creating a regular mechanism for managing economic tensions.
4. **Trade-war de-escalation:** After both sides imposed **125% tariffs in April 2025**, they stepped back from a wider trade war to protect their economic interests.
5. **Fragile tariff truce:** The **Busan Tariff Truce** remains temporary, with its original 12-month period extended by only two months, leaving trade tensions unresolved.
6. **Technology restrictions:** The U.S. continues to restrict China's access to **advanced technologies, including advanced chips**, where China remains several years behind the U.S.
7. **Restrictive investment regime:** Bilateral foreign investment rules remain **deeply restrictive on both sides**, showing that economic engagement remains limited despite improved political dialogue.

Drivers Behind the Rapprochement

1. **China's economic weakness:** Weak consumption, a **six-year residential construction recession** and stagnant private investment have increased Beijing's dependence on public investment and net exports.
2. **Need for domestic stability:** With Xi Jinping seeking a record **fourth term in 2027**, China wants a stable external environment to reduce pressure on its domestic economy.
3. **Risk of renewed trade war:** Beijing wants to prevent another major U.S. trade offensive because exports remain an important support for its economic growth.
4. **U.S. economic interests:** Washington also faces costs from prolonged trade conflict, economic decoupling and disruption of global supply chains, creating incentives for limited cooperation.

5. **Shared interest in stability:** Both powers recognise that uncontrolled rivalry can produce wider economic and geopolitical disruptions, making managed competition preferable to open confrontation.
6. **Changing strategic balance:** China sees itself as a **near-peer** after resisting U.S. pressure, while Washington increasingly recognises that China cannot simply be contained through sustained confrontation.

Significance for the Global Order

1. **Potential G2 framework:** Greater U.S.-China coordination could increasingly shape **global geopolitics, geoeconomics and technology**, giving the two powers greater influence over international outcomes.
2. **Possibility of stability:** Better management of rivalry could reduce the risks of trade wars, military escalation and wider disruption in the international system.
3. **Limits on decoupling:** Continued economic engagement may prevent the high costs associated with complete separation of the two major economies.
4. **Technology as strategic competition:** Artificial intelligence and advanced chips remain central to the rivalry, with both sides treating technological leadership as a source of global power.
5. **Global South dilemma:** Countries outside the two major powers may face pressure to navigate between competing U.S.- and China-led economic and technological systems.
6. **Risk of great-power dominance:** A strong bilateral understanding could allow the two powers to protect their interests while reducing the strategic space available to third countries.

Implications for India

1. **Reduced U.S. dependence on India:** If Washington manages a temporary accommodation with Beijing, India may become less central to the U.S. strategy of balancing China.
2. **Changing Indo-Pacific priorities:** Greater U.S. attention to the Philippines and other regional partners could reduce India's relative importance within Washington's Asian strategy.
3. **Pressure on India's strategic space:** A U.S.-China accommodation could reduce India's room to shape the Indo-Pacific independently, as both major powers may prioritise their own bilateral interests.
4. **Limits on Indian ambitions:** U.S. positions on India's regional role and growth indicate that Washington may not support unlimited expansion of Indian strategic influence.
5. **Persistent Chinese challenge:** China continues to challenge India through territorial disputes, economic dependence, regional ambitions and its close relationship with Pakistan.
6. **Trade vulnerability:** India's trade deficit with China has reached **\$100 billion**, showing the economic dependence that can reduce India's strategic flexibility.

7. **Need for geopolitical insurance:** These Chinese pressures make India's Indo-Pacific partnerships important for protecting its interests and maintaining strategic options.

Challenges to India's Strategic Autonomy

1. **Risk of asymmetric dependence:** Excessive reliance on Washington could turn India into a junior partner instead of allowing it to act as an independent strategic power.
2. **Economic concessions:** India's proposed commitment to purchase **\$500 billion of American goods** raises concerns about whether economic policy is sufficiently aligned with national interests.
3. **Technology dependence:** Restructuring India's AI and digital infrastructure around a U.S.-led technology stack could create new forms of strategic dependence.
4. **Domestic capability gaps:** Weaknesses in advanced industries, innovation, manufacturing and strategic sectors limit India's ability to negotiate with major powers on equal terms.
5. **Policy and institutional weaknesses:** Poor handling of global finance, trade and supply-chain disruptions, along with weakened institutions, can reduce India's strategic effectiveness.
6. **Risk of semi-peripheral status:** Without stronger economic and technological capabilities, India may remain a major market and partner rather than becoming a power capable of shaping global rules.

Way Forward for India

1. **Build industrial strength:** India should develop a durable industrial base and advanced strategic sectors to reduce external dependence and strengthen its bargaining power.
2. **Recalibrate economic policy:** Trade, investment and industrial policies should be treated as instruments of **statecraft**, linking economic strength with strategic autonomy.
3. **Diversify partnerships:** India should deepen bilateral relationships across major and middle powers instead of depending excessively on either Washington or Beijing.
4. **Strengthen governance:** Better governance, stronger institutions and greater policy coherence are necessary to convert India's economic potential into global influence.
5. **Promote technological capability:** India needs stronger domestic innovation and advanced technology capacity to compete effectively in strategic sectors such as AI and digital infrastructure.
6. **Develop strategic agency:** India should move beyond balancing major powers and build enough national capability to **shape the emerging global order independently**.

Conclusion

The China-U.S. rapprochement marks a shift towards **managed strategic competition rather than a stable G2 partnership**. Economic and geopolitical pressures encourage both powers to limit escalation, but their core rivalry remains. India therefore needs **stronger domestic capabilities, diversified partnerships and strategic autonomy** to protect its interests and shape the emerging global order.

Question for practice:

Discuss the emerging China-U.S. rapprochement and its implications for the global order and India's strategic autonomy.

Source: [The Hindu](#); [Indian Express](#)

Indian Research Can Shape the World

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Science and Technology

Introduction

India has often depended on technologies developed elsewhere, leading to delayed entry, foreign licences and dependence on external know-how. However, the growing integration of **fundamental science and technology** has shortened the path from discovery to application. This creates an opportunity for India to move beyond catching up and shape emerging technologies. A strong research ecosystem, therefore, can help India convert its scientific talent into **global technological leadership, economic strength and self-reliance**.

Changing Science–Technology Landscape: From Discovery to Innovation

1. **From separation to integration:** Science and technology were once largely separate, but fundamental research and practical applications now increasingly develop together.
2. **Shorter research-to-technology cycle:** The gap between scientific discovery and technological application has shortened, making **fundamental research a direct source of innovation**.
3. **CRISPR as an example:** Research on bacterial defence mechanisms led to **CRISPR within a few years**, showing how basic research can produce transformative technologies.
4. **First-mover opportunity:** India must invest in fundamental research to create the **next technological wave**, rather than repeatedly adopting technologies developed elsewhere.

India's Emerging Research and Innovation Ecosystem

1. **Growing innovation performance:** India has recorded **five consecutive years of double-digit growth in innovation indicators**, while research output increased by **7.6%**, showing stronger domestic research momentum.
2. **Improving global position:** India improved its Global Innovation Index ranking from **40th in 2023 to 38th in 2025** and ranks first among lower-middle-income economies and Central and South Asia.
3. **NEP 2020 focus:** National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places **research, inquiry-based learning, critical thinking and innovation** at the centre of educational reform to build future research capacity.

4. **Interdisciplinary research:** NEP seeks to reduce rigid disciplinary boundaries and promote problem-based learning across **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), social sciences and humanities**, strengthening wider innovation capabilities.
5. **ANRF institutional support:** The **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** aims to bridge funding gaps, build research capacity and promote collaboration among academia, industry and government.
6. **Research funding initiatives:** ANRF received **₹966 crore in revised estimates for 2024–25** and supports programmes covering early-career researchers, partnerships, inclusivity and distinguished researchers.

Research Deficit: Persistent Gaps in India's Innovation Ecosystem

1. **Low R&D intensity:** Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) more than doubled between 2010–11 and 2020–21, but remained only **0.6–0.8% of GDP**, below the global average.
2. **Weak performance against peers:** India still trails **China, South Korea and Singapore** in infrastructure, human capital, research and business sophistication despite strong potential in knowledge creation.
3. **Uneven innovation pillars:** Infrastructure improved from **84th in 2023 to 61st in 2025**, but human capital and research fell from **48th to 54th**, showing uneven progress.
4. **Weak market ecosystem:** Market sophistication declined from **20th in 2023 to 38th in 2025**, indicating weaknesses in credit, investment, trade and market diversification needed for innovation.
5. **Institutional constraints:** India's institutional ranking declined from **54th in 2024 to 58th in 2025**, reflecting continuing problems in the regulatory and policy environment.
6. **Limited research impact:** Publications have increased, but many are in **lower-impact journals**, while patent filings remain modest, limiting research visibility and application.
7. **Concentration and regional inequality:** The top **19 IITs and IISc** account for **28.70% of publications and 30.84% of citations**, while several eastern and northeastern states continue to record low R&D investment.
8. **Weak industry-academia linkage:** Private-sector R&D was only about **36% of total R&D spending in 2020–21**, while dependence on imported technologies weakens domestic R&D and technology commercialisation.

From Research to Global Impact: Four Strategic Priorities

1. Quality Education at Scale

- **Research-based learning:** Expand quality education and create experimental **research foundries** where students work with real instruments and real problems.

- **AI-enabled access:** Use AI to reach students poorly served by existing institutions and widen access to learning.

2. Open National Laboratories

- **Break institutional isolation:** Make national laboratories accessible to **researchers, students and companies outside** their walls.
- **Three-zone model:** Use **green zones for open interaction, amber for collaboration and red for strategic work**, with most activities in the first two.

3. Flexible Research Governance

- **Reduce compliance burden:** High-quality institutions should receive greater freedom from excessive **General Financial Rules compliance**.
- **Outcome-based accountability:** Evaluate institutions through **research outcomes rather than procedural compliance at every step**.

4. Faster Research Regulation

- **Speed up approvals:** Make approvals for research involving **biological materials and clinical trials** faster and more predictable.
- **Support smaller institutions:** Reduce regulatory burdens because excessive delays and costs disadvantage **small and medium-sized institutions**.

The Way Forward

1. **Raise R&D investment:** Move towards **1.5% of GDP for R&D by 2030** through stronger public funding, private-sector incentives and innovative financing.
2. **Democratise research:** Allocate ANRF resources transparently to **state universities and colleges** through seed grants, laboratories, mentorship and regional innovation clusters.
3. **Strengthen research-to-market links:** Create joint university-industry R&D centres and link incentives with **commercialisation, patents, start-ups and practical outcomes**.
4. **Build research human capital:** Strengthen faculty training, research internships and fellowships while attracting Indian researchers abroad through **competitive salaries and laboratory autonomy**.
5. **Support national development:** Build indigenous capabilities in **semiconductors, AI, renewable energy and defence while** using research to address health, agriculture, nutrition and climate challenges.
6. **Make excellence systemic:** Convert successful pockets of research excellence into wider institutional practice so that innovation becomes the **norm rather than an exception**.

Conclusion

India has the scientific talent and a growing research base to **move beyond technological catch-up**. NEP 2020 and **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** provide an institutional foundation, but higher R&D investment, wider research opportunities, flexible regulation and stronger industry linkages are essential. **Converting scientific knowledge into technologies** can strengthen self-reliance, economic competitiveness and solutions to social challenges, enabling India to shape future global innovation.

Question for Practice:

Evaluate whether India's research ecosystem can enable it to move from technological catch-up to global technological leadership.

Source: [The Hindu](#) ; [ORF](#)

AI companions and child safety

Source: The post "AI companions and child safety" has been created based on "AI companions and child safety" published in "The Hindu" on 8th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Governance

Context: AI chatbots are increasingly becoming emotional companions for children because they are available throughout the day and appear empathetic and responsive. This has created new concerns regarding **child safety, psychological well-being and regulatory accountability**.

About AI chatbots

1. AI chatbots use AI models **to interpret natural language, maintain context and generate responses**.
2. They can handle a **wider variety of questions and conversations**.
3. Well-known examples **include ChatGPT and Claude**, which allow users to ask open-ended questions and receive conversational responses.

Emerging concerns

1. **Emotional dependence:** Prolonged interaction with AI companions may create emotional dependence among children.
2. **Psychological manipulation:** Algorithmic responses may influence vulnerable children in harmful ways.
3. **Harmful advice:** AI interactions may expose children to inappropriate or dangerous advice.
4. **Difficulty in detecting harm:** Unlike conventional cybercrime, psychological harm may develop gradually through thousands of seemingly harmless interactions.
5. **Platform accountability:** The products of technology companies are becoming deeply embedded in children's emotional lives, raising questions about their responsibility when harm occurs.

Regulatory gaps in India

1. India's existing laws, including the **Information Technology Act, 2000, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**, address important aspects of digital safety but do not provide a **comprehensive framework for psychological risks from AI companions**.
2. Existing cybercrime mechanisms may not be adequately equipped to examine **algorithmic behaviour and chatbot interactions** as evidence.
3. Therefore, accountability for AI-related psychological harm remains an emerging challenge.

Constitutional and regulatory concerns

1. **Article 21** guarantees the **right to life and personal liberty**, giving renewed significance to protecting children's safety in the digital environment.
2. **Article 39(f)** emphasises conditions in which children can develop with **freedom and dignity** and are protected against exploitation.
3. Therefore, child safety must extend beyond physical safety and personal-data protection to include **emotional and psychological safety**.

Way forward

1. India should establish **age-appropriate safeguards** for AI companions.
2. There should be **crisis-response mechanisms and independent safety assessments**.
3. Effective **parental oversight** should be encouraged while respecting children's privacy and evolving autonomy.
4. Cybercrime agencies should be equipped to examine **algorithmic behaviour and chatbot interactions**.
5. California's **Senate Bill 1119 ("Adam's Law")**, enacted in 2026, provides safeguards such as **crisis-detection protocols, parental controls, notifications regarding disabled safety settings and independent safety audits**. India can examine such developments but should develop a framework suited to its **own institutional capacity and digital realities**.
6. Platforms should have clear **accountability mechanisms** when prolonged AI interaction causes harm.
7. Regulation should remain **balanced**, as excessive restrictions could discourage innovation and burden emerging enterprises.

Conclusion: The objective should not be to prevent children from using AI but to ensure that **technological progress is accompanied by accountability, safety and protection of children's dignity and well-being**. The central challenge is ensuring that institutions responsible for child protection can keep pace with rapidly evolving AI technologies.

Question: With the growing use of AI companions by children, discuss the emerging risks and the need for a balanced regulatory framework in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

How does detention differ from arrest?

Source: The post "How does detention differ from arrest?" has been created based on "How does detention differ from arrest?" published in "Indian Express" on 8th October 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Polity

Context: Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi was detained recently as Opposition leaders protested in New Delhi demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar over alleged irregularities in the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise.

About Detention and Arrest

1. **Arrest** is a **formal act of taking a person into custody in connection with an offence** and marks the **beginning of criminal proceedings**.

- a. **Once a person is arrested, a range of constitutional and statutory safeguards immediately come into existence.**
2. **Detention generally involves temporary custody, particularly for maintaining law and order or preventing an offence**, and may end without registration of a case.
3. During protests, **a person may be taken into custody for several hours and released without an FIR.**
4. Therefore, detention can appear similar to arrest but **may legally be treated as an exercise of preventive police powers.**
5. Detention and arrest both involve restriction of individual liberty, but they have different legal meanings.
6. The BNSS does not specifically define “detention”; instead, it provides police with powers to stop, remove or temporarily hold persons in certain situations.

Police powers related to detention under BNSS

1. **Section 170 BNSS:** Police **can take preventive action before an offence** is committed when they know of a plan to commit a cognizable offence and believe it cannot otherwise be prevented.
2. **Section 172 BNSS:** Police may **detain or remove** a person who resists, refuses, ignores or disregards a lawful direction. The person must be taken before a magistrate or, in petty cases, released within **24 hours**. This provision is new compared with the earlier CrPC.
3. **Section 163 BNSS:** Police **may impose prohibitory orders to address law-and-order concerns**. For example, during the recent protests such an order was imposed across New Delhi.
 - a. **Section 223 BNS:** Disobedience of **such a lawful order is an offence** and may lead to an FIR and arrest.

Judicial safeguards

Courts have repeatedly held that police powers cannot be exercised arbitrarily:

1. **Joginder Kumar v. State of UP (1994):** The existence of the power to arrest does not by itself justify its exercise.
2. **Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014):** Police should not automatically arrest persons in offences punishable with imprisonment up to seven years.
3. **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018):** Restrictions on protests should be **regulatory**, rather than completely eliminating the right to protest.

Constitutional & legal Rights of detained and arrested persons

1. **Article 22:** An arrested person must be produced before a magistrate within **24 hours**, informed of the grounds of arrest and provided the right to legal representation.
 - a. The Supreme Court has held that **written grounds of arrest must be supplied**, and violation of Article 22 safeguards can make an arrest unconstitutional.
 - b. **Article 22(1):** Provides the right to consult and be defended by a lawyer of one's choice.
2. **Section 38 BNSS:** Allows an arrested person **to meet an advocate of their choice during interrogation**, though not throughout the interrogation.
 - a. Persons unable to afford a lawyer are entitled to **free legal aid at the State's cost**.
3. **Section 43(5) BNSS:** A woman cannot ordinarily be arrested between **sunrise and sunset**, except in exceptional circumstances and with prior permission of a judicial magistrate.

4. **D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997):** Safeguards include visible identification of police officers, an arrest memo attested by a witness, recording of injuries and informing family members. Non-compliance can lead to departmental action or contempt proceedings.

Conclusion: The BNSS gives police important **preventive and law-and-order powers**, but these powers must operate within constitutional limits. Effective policing therefore requires a balance between **public order, the right to protest and protection of individual liberty**.

Question: What is the distinction between detention and arrest under Indian law? Discuss the powers of the police and the constitutional and legal safeguards available to detained and arrested persons.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

India's Stakes in the Global Pandemic Agreement

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

COVID-19 exposed major gaps in **vaccine access, technology sharing, health-system capacity and global coordination**, creating the need for stronger pandemic governance. The **WHO Pandemic Agreement, adopted in May 2025**, seeks to strengthen international cooperation on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. For India, the agreement has strategic importance as a major pharmaceutical producer and Global South partner, while raising concerns over **equity, technology access and national sovereignty**.

Global Pandemic Governance: Equity vs Sovereignty

1. **WHO Pandemic Agreement:** The **WHO Pandemic Agreement (PA)** was adopted by the **World Health Assembly in May 2025** to strengthen global pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (PPPR).
2. **Broad International Support:** The **agreement received 124 votes in favour, none against and 11 abstentions**, reflecting broad support across different income groups.
3. **Emerging Legal Framework:** The agreement creates a **first-of-its-kind global legal framework for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response**, though ratification awaits the Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) annex.
4. **North-South Divide:** Developing countries seek greater finance and technology access, while developed countries resist some binding commitments on technology transfer and other obligations.
5. **One Health Financing:** African countries sought funding before accepting commitments to monitor human-animal-environment links, a major source of pandemic risks.

6. **Vaccine Access:** Global negotiations address whether private manufacturers can provide vaccines and therapeutics quickly and affordably during future pandemics.
7. **PABS Negotiations:** The unresolved Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) system **aims to ensure countries contributing biological resources receive fair access to vaccines, medicines and therapeutics.**
8. **Sovereignty and Cooperation:** The central issue is balancing national sovereignty with international solidarity, while ensuring global commitments reflect national circumstances and capacities.

India's Position and Strategic Stakes

1. **Sovereignty with Cooperation:** India supports stronger international coordination while insisting that pandemic measures respect **national sovereignty, domestic law and national circumstances.**
2. **Equitable Health Access:** India seeks **fair access to vaccines, medicines, diagnostics and therapeutics,** especially for countries with weaker health systems.
3. **Fair PABS System:** Countries providing pathogens and biological resources **should receive timely access to vaccines, technologies and other benefits.**
4. **Technology Dependence:** India manufactures major vaccine volumes but remains dependent on global pharmaceutical companies for patents and on imports for **Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).**
5. **Advanced Manufacturing:** Access to Global North technologies is important for India to develop high-grade Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical devices.
6. **Digital Public Infrastructure:** India wants its digital health systems for surveillance, vaccination, supply chains and service continuity recognised as global public goods.

India's Contribution to Global Pandemic Preparedness

1. **Whole-of-Government Approach:** India follows a coordinated **whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach** covering different types of health emergencies.
2. **Health-System Capacity:** India is expanding **laboratory networks, emergency coordination, health workforce, stockpiles and clinical care capacity** for future emergencies.
3. **Domestic Financing:** Pandemic preparedness should remain anchored in national health systems, development plans and domestic financing, with international support complementing national efforts.

4. **COVID-19 Health Assistance:** India supplied **300 million vaccine doses to around 100 countries and two UN entities** and provided medical assistance to **over 150 countries**, demonstrating its role in supporting global health security.
5. **Digital Health Infrastructure:** India's digital health infrastructure, laboratory networks and **One Health** capabilities can provide useful global public goods for pandemic preparedness.

Way Forward

1. **Lead PABS Negotiations:** India should actively shape the **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)** framework to secure equitable benefit-sharing, timely access and respect for national sovereignty.
2. **Bridge North-South Differences:** India should balance the interests of **High-Income, Lower-Middle-Income and Low-Income Countries** while seeking greater equity in finance, technology and pandemic responsibilities.
3. **Build South-South Partnerships:** India should develop partnerships on **One Health, surveillance and health workforce strengthening**, creating practical solutions for difficult sovereignty-related issues.
4. **Use Multilateral Platforms:** India can use the **Group of Twenty (G20)** and **Partners for Multilateralism** to build wider support for equitable pandemic governance.
5. **Reduce Technology Dependence:** India should strengthen access to advanced technologies and domestic capabilities in **vaccines, medical devices, Personal Protective Equipment and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients**.
6. **Strengthen Domestic Architecture:** India should improve **pandemic surveillance, health financing, laboratories, workforce and biological-material regulation** to strengthen its global negotiating position.
7. **Expand Digital Health Cooperation:** India should share its digital health capabilities with developing countries and promote **digital public infrastructure as a global public good**.

Conclusion

The Pandemic Agreement can either reproduce **COVID-19-era inequalities** or create a more inclusive global health order. India should combine **equity, sovereignty, domestic capacity and South-South cooperation**. Its pharmaceutical strength, digital infrastructure and health-system experience can support global leadership, while a credible PABS system remains central to equitable pandemic preparedness.

Question for practice:

Discuss India's stakes in the Global Pandemic Agreement and the measures needed to strengthen its role in global pandemic governance.

Source: [The Hindu](#); [ddnews](#)

Property Taxation Needs Structural Reform

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources

Introduction

India's urban centres face rising demands for **infrastructure and public services** due to rapid urbanisation and ageing infrastructure. Property tax is the most important own-source revenue of municipal bodies and is vital for **municipal creditworthiness and urban investment**. Yet, India's property tax collection remains low despite technology and process-based reforms. This shows that stronger **municipal capacity, timely elections and financial governance** are also needed.

Present Status: Low and Underutilised Property Tax Potential

1. **Low Revenue Collection:** India's cumulative property tax revenue is only 0.15–0.2% of GDP, compared with 0.6% in middle-income countries and 0.3% in low-income countries.
2. **Urban Investment Gap:** Weak property tax performance limits municipal revenues, affecting their creditworthiness and ability to bridge the growing gap in urban investment.
3. **Rising Service Demands:** Rapid urbanisation, ageing infrastructure and rising public-service demands require stronger municipal revenues for roads, water, sanitation and waste management.
4. **Large Revenue Potential:** The IMF estimates that India could increase property tax revenue tenfold, creating greater capacity for investment in urban infrastructure.

Existing Property Tax System

1. **Three Stages of Taxation:** Property taxation involves enumeration, valuation and assessment, and billing and collection, with weaknesses at each stage affecting final revenue outcomes.
2. **Incomplete Property Enumeration:** Unregistered properties, outdated records and manual record-keeping reduce the accuracy of the tax base and limit municipal revenue collection.
3. **Limited Technology Effectiveness:** GIS mapping through satellite imagery and drones can identify properties, but regular physical inspections and repeated mapping remain necessary.
4. **Area-based Valuation:** Most municipalities use a base rate per square foot per month, rather than directly linking property tax to current market values.
5. **Weak Tax Buoyancy:** Municipal base rates are revised infrequently compared with stamp-duty-linked circle rates, reducing the responsiveness of property tax revenue.
6. **Poor Collection Efficiency:** Online collection and outsourcing have been promoted, but tax collection remains weak and credible efficiency estimates are difficult without proper accounts.

7. **Narrow Tax Base:** Excessive exemptions for categories such as government properties and religious institutions further reduce the number of properties contributing to municipal revenue.

Structural Factors Behind Poor Tax Performance and Limits of Existing Reforms

1. **Municipal Staff Shortage:** Shortages of municipal staff, inadequate skills and weak capacity building limit physical verification, property assessment and effective maintenance of tax records.
2. **Importance of In-house Assessors:** Chennai research found that **municipal tax assessors achieve better outcomes than outsourced assessors**, partly because they possess institutional memory.
3. **Limits of Technology:** GIS mapping and digital systems cannot replace regular physical verification and capable municipal staff, limiting the impact of technology-led reforms.
4. **Irregular Municipal Elections:** Research across **Bengaluru, Pune and Ghaziabad** found that base-rate revisions did not occur when elected municipal councils were absent.
5. **Weak Financial Reporting:** Poorly maintained financial accounts make it difficult to determine **credible collection efficiency** and properly assess municipal tax performance.
6. **Political Reluctance:** Property tax directly affects citizens and is politically sensitive, creating reluctance to increase taxes despite growing municipal revenue needs.
7. **Affordability Concerns:** Higher property taxes can create financial pressure for **asset-rich but cash-poor taxpayers**, requiring targeted relief during reform.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Municipal Human Resources:** Municipalities need adequate **trained tax assessors and capacity building** to improve enumeration, assessment and maintenance of property records.
2. **Combine Technology with Verification:** GIS and satellite mapping should be supported by **regular physical inspections** to identify properties accurately and keep records updated.
3. **Modernise Property Valuation:** Property valuation should better reflect current property values, while municipal base rates should be **revised regularly** to improve tax buoyancy.
4. **Ensure Timely Elections:** Regular municipal elections can strengthen local accountability and enable elected councils to take necessary decisions on **property tax and base-rate revisions**.
5. **Improve Financial Reporting:** Municipalities should maintain proper financial accounts and make **financial data publicly available** to improve transparency and assess collection performance.
6. **Rationalise Exemptions:** Property tax exemptions should be limited to **well-defined categories**, thereby broadening the tax base and improving transparency and equity.
7. **Protect Vulnerable Taxpayers:** **Progressive rates and deferments** for asset-rich but cash-poor taxpayers can address affordability concerns while supporting property tax reform.

8. **Link Tax with Services:** Additional revenue should be reinvested in visible improvements such as roads, water supply, drainage and waste management to build public trust.
9. **Use Global Experiences:** Lagos increased property tax revenue fivefold through digital mapping and modernised administration, while South Korea uses property transaction taxes of 1–7%.

Conclusion

Property tax reform requires more than **technology, digitisation and process improvements**. Stronger municipal staff, timely elections, better valuation, wider tax coverage and transparent financial reporting are equally important. A fairer system can strengthen municipal finances and improve urban services. Linking higher collections with visible infrastructure improvements can also build **public trust and support sustainable urban growth**.

Question for practice:

Examine why India's property tax system needs structural reforms beyond technology and process-based reforms.

Source: [The Hindu](#); [businessline](#)