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7 PM COMPILATION

3rd and 4th week October, 2026

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Integrated Theatre Command – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise



Indian military is actively developing an integrated logistics structure to support its planned theatre commands as part of its effort to transform the service-specific logistics architecture into an integrated defence framework. The creation of Theatre Commands (Theaterization) has been hailed as a major military reform for better responses during conflict. The plan is to have five unified or theatre commands, which will help in better planning and military response, and aim to have a unified approach to fighting any future war. But, the entire process has been riddled with a visible lack of consensus amongst the three arms of the military forces.

What is Integrated Theatre Command (TC)? What is the existing command structure in India?

- **Integrated Theatre Command:** It is a military structure which seeks to integrate the capabilities of the three services– army, air force and navy– in order to optimally utilize their resources for wars and operations.
- **Organisation of Theatre Command:** These 'unified combat commands' are organized either on a geographical basis (with a defined mission in a specific 'area of responsibility' somewhere on the globe) or on a functional basis.
- **International operation of Theatre command:** Almost all major countries like China, Russia, the US, the UK and France work on a theatre command concept. **For e.g.** China's Western Theatre Command looks after the entire borders with India.
- **Existing Command Structure in India:**
    - India has 17 single service commands and only two tri-service commands.
    - **Single Service Command:** The 17 single service commands are divided as:
        - Army – 7 commands;
        - Airforce – 7 commands;
        - Navy – 3 commands.

- **Tri-Service Command:** The two tri-service commands are- **Andaman and Nicobar Command** (ANC), and **The Strategic Force Command** (SFC). The Andaman and Nicobar command is a full-fledged command raised as a tri-service command in 2001. The Strategic Force Command (SFC) handles the nuclear weapons.

What has been the committee recommendations on Integrated Theatre commands in India?



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Committee Recommendations	**Kargil Review Committee**, **Naresh Chandra Committee** (2012), and **Shekatkar Committee** (2016), recommended creating a tri-service commander role, which will help in the creation of integrated theatre commands.
Appointment of CDS	The appointment of **CDS** in 2019 and the decision to create the **Department of Military Affairs** (DMA) within the Ministry of Defence have all been steps in the direction of achieving jointness between the three branches of the armed forces.

What are the recent steps taken by the Government on Integrated Theatre Command?

Proposal to create a national defence committee	There is a proposal for theatre commanders under a national defence committee likely to be headed by the Defence Minister.
Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Act 2023	The Act empowers the **Commander-in-Chief** and the **Officer-in-command** of inter-services organisations with disciplinary and administrative powers over personnel from the other services serving in them.

Proposed Organizational structure for Integrated Theatre Command:

Appointment of a Vice Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)	The Vice CDS is likely to be an officer of the rank of General or equivalent. He is expected to look after strategic planning, capability development and procurement-related matters.
Appointment of a Deputy CDS	The Deputy CDS is likely to be an officer of the rank of **Lieutenant General** or equivalent. He will be responsible for operations, intelligence and will coordinate the allocation of assets between theatres.
Proposed commands	The overall plan is to establish three adversary-based theatre commands– one facing Pakistan, another opposite China, and a maritime theatre command to tackle maritime threats outside the coastal borders of the country.
Role of three service chiefs	The three service chiefs will be responsible for raising, training and sustaining the individual services. No additional manpower is likely to be enrolled. Only readjustments within organisations will be carried out to meet the requirements of the theatre commands.

What are the benefits of Integrated Theatre Commands (ITC)?

1. **Increased efficiency:** It will lead to rationalization of war fighting resources, and efficiency of executions resulting in an integrated action to counter threats.
2. **Rationalization of the command structure:** The present command structure in the Indian military is pretty uneven. The Indian Army has seven commands, while a much smaller Indian Air Force has a similar number of commands and the Indian Navy has three commands. This structure will be rationalized under the theatre command concept.
3. **Effective neutralization of Chinese threat:** China's Western Theater Command looks after the entire borders with India, unlike India where it has multiple Commands and structures to respond with different officers at the top.
4. **Cost-effective in the long run:** Theaterization will help in better planning and military response and also bring down costs. While the cost may go up in the immediate future since all theaters would have to be armed with sufficient systems, it will prove to be cost-effective in the long term as all acquisitions will be a unified one.
5. **Operational Freedom:** The integrated theatre commander will not be answerable to individual Services, and will be free to train, equip and exercise his command to make it a cohesive fighting force capable of achieving designated goals.

What are the Challenges in the establishment of Integrated Theatre Command in India?

1. **Inter-Service Competition:** The intense focus of each service on its own assets and influence can hinder the creation of synergy among the services.
2. **Massive funding:** Creation of infrastructure for the Theatre commands will require huge amounts of funding.
3. **Different service cultures:** The service culture and way of functioning of the three services is very different. The Indian Army has regimental affiliations and is bound by its legacy. Finding the right mix of service culture remains a challenge.

4. **Perception of Army Dominance:** There are concerns that the integration of the commands that may perpetuate the perceived dominance of the army and provide it with greater operational control.
5. **Infrastructure and Logistical coordination issues:** Coordinating and synchronizing the infrastructure and logistics requirements across different services could be complex and resource-intensive.
6. **Lack of National Security Strategy (NSS):** Many retired military professionals have criticised implementing theatre commands without having a coherent National Security Strategy (NSS).

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **A supportive ecosystem:** In order for Theatre Commands to be effective, there needs to be a supporting ecosystem. India still remains the 2nd largest arms importer in the world. Hence, indigenous technology and hardware by self-reliance should be a priority.
2. **Managing internal & external security:** There needs to be an assessment of how the internal and external security will be managed under the theatre commands. It is because there are lakhs of paramilitary personnel and the Indian Coast Guard.
3. **Parliament's role:** The legislature needs to play a far more proactive role. A Dedicated Standing Committee of Parliament should be created. It needs to be staffed with military advisers and other professionals to independently monitor the transition very minutely.
4. **Geography-based theatres:** Keeping in mind the changing nature of threats, India can also aim for four geography-based theatres – **Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western –** each equipped to use land, sea, air, space, and cyber power to handle all threats in their areas.
5. **Talent-based appointments:** No theatre should 'belong' to any service, and command appointments should be decided based on talent and experience in joint operations.
6. **Clear working out of Budgetary allocations:** Budgetary allocations and the distribution of funds need to be clearly worked out to enable the setting up of a seamless theatre command system
7. **Modular structure:** In the theaterization debate, India must not forget to modularize its armed forces. The present big hierarchical formations need to be divided into many small networked brigades. Multiple studies have shown that these are superior to the division-based structure in terms of deployability, employability, and sustainability.

Conclusion: India operates the 4th largest military in the World, and with each service acting independent of each other, the formation of theatre commands is indeed a need of the hour. But, the successful launch of the Theatre Commands should not be rushed. Issues and concerns of all the stakeholders must be resolved first.

Read More: Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Security

Stampede Disaster & its Management in India – Explained Pointwise

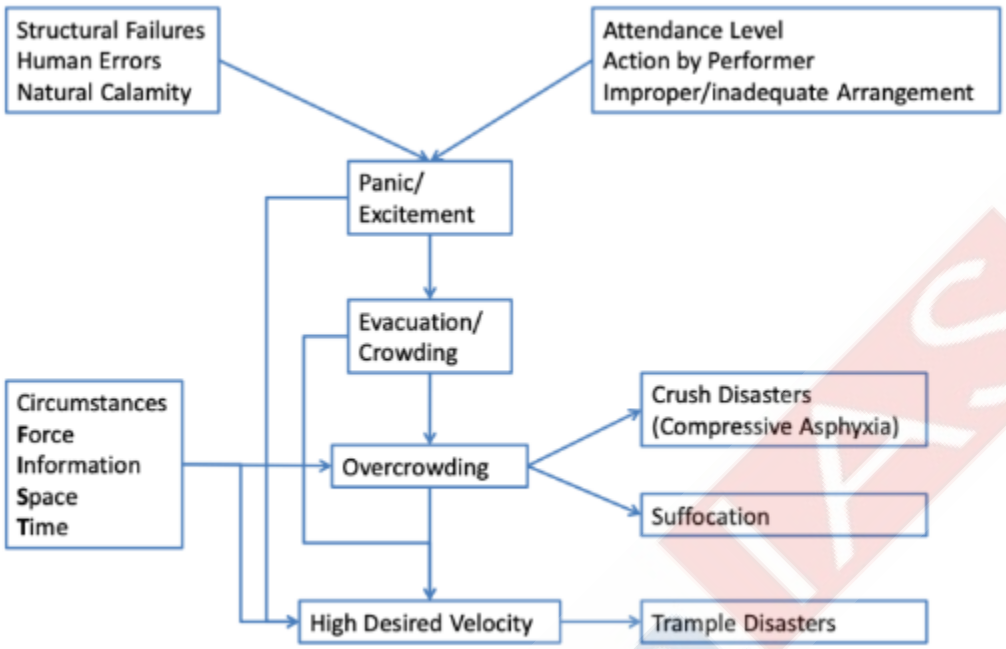


At least 19 people were killed & more were injured after a crowd surge at a Durga Pandal in Kolkata recently. This calls for a detailed look into the issue of Stampede Disaster and the measures needed to be taken to manage it.

What is stampede? What are the infamous stampede cases in India?

- **Stampede:** Stampede is the disruption of the orderly movement of crowds which leads to injuries and fatalities. This impulsive mass movement of crowd often takes place in response to a perceived danger, loss of physical space or a will to attain something as gratifying.

Process of a Stampede



Source- NDMA Disaster Guidelines

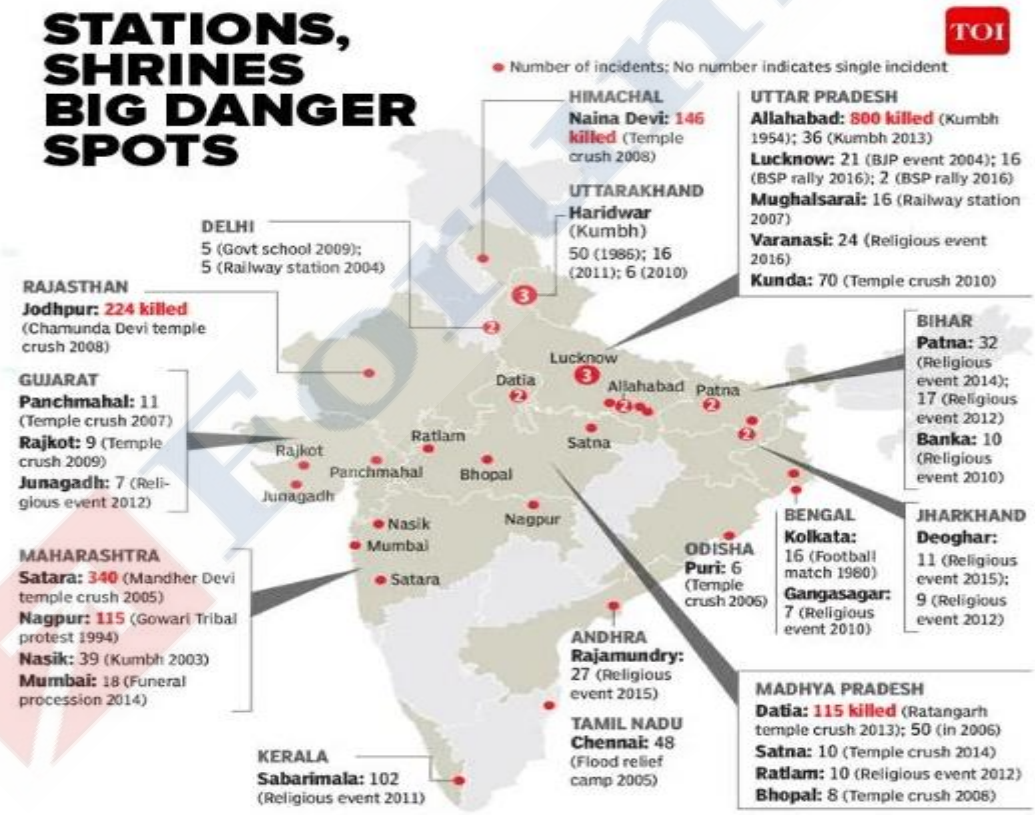
Some Notable Deadly Stampede Disasters in India:

Allahabad Kumbh Mela Stampede (1954)	It is the most fatal Kumbh Mela stampede in history. It resulted in the loss of around 800 lives.
Wai Stampede (2005)	The stampede at the Mandhardevi temple in Maharashtra's Satara district resulted in the death of 340 people.
Naina Devi Temple Stampede (2008)	Rumors of landslide started the stampede at the Naina Devi Temple in 2008. It resulted in the death of at least 145 people which included dozens of women and children.
Jodhpur Temple Stampede (2008)	The stampede at the Chamunda Devi Temple resulted in the death of at least 168 people.
Allahabad Railway Stampede (2013)	Last-minute change in the platform for the pilgrims who had gathered for the Khumbh Mela, created panic and resulted in a stampede. It led to the loss of around 36 lives.

Mumbai pedestrian bridge Stampede (2017)	The stampede at the crowded Pedestrian Bridge connecting the two Mumbai railway stations resulted in the death of 22 people and injured 32.
Mata Vaishnav Devi shrine (2022)	The Stampede at the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine resulted in the death 22 people and injured 32.
Hathras Stampede (2024)	During a religious gathering in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras district on July 2, 2024, at least 121 people (almost all women) lost their lives.

Stampede Statistics In India:

- According to the National Crime Records Bureau figures, from 2000 to 2013, almost 2,000 people died in stampedes in India.
- A 2013 study published by International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction (IJDRR) points out that religious gathering and pilgrimages have been venues for 79% of the stampedes in India.



Source-TOI

What are the major causes of Stampedes in India?

Structural Causes	The stampedes occur due to structural and design failures in the buildings, bridges etc. This includes the following causes: (a) Structural collapse of makeshift bridges, railings, temporary structures. (b) Improper and unauthorised built structures. (c) Railings of the bridge collapsing due to panic triggered by rumours. (d) Difficult terrain (famous religious sites built on top of hills that are difficult to access). (e) Narrow streets with very few entry/exits. (f) Absence of emergency exits.
Fire/ Electricity causes	This includes the following causes: (a) Fire in a makeshift facility or a shop, and illegal and unauthorised structure. (b) Non-availability of fire extinguishers in working condition. (c) Building and fire code violations, unauthorized fireworks in enclosed places. (d) Electricity supply failure creating panic and triggering a sudden exodus. (e) Illegal electric connections and faulty electric equipment.
Crowd Behaviour	The stampedes are either triggered or made worse by panic. Crowd behaviour plays an important role in it. Following are some crowd behaviour causes: (a) Craze: In large group settings, this "craze" percolates to every member and can make them act in detriment to their own individual interests. **For e.g.** One of the major causes behind the recent Hathras Stampede has been the rush to touch the preacher's feet and trying to collect soil from where he walked. (b) Crowds forcing to entrance/exits a venue after the start/closing time (c) Rush during distribution of disaster relief supplies (d) A large (much more than expected) anxious and competitive crowd gathering at promotional events (f) Unruly and irresponsible crowd behaviour (g) Last minute change in platform for train arrival/departure resulting in lots of movements within short period of time.

Security Issues	This includes: **(a) Security Personnel:** (i) Under deployment of security staff and deployment of untrained staff (ii) Lack of adequate rehearsals and briefing of security personnel on crowd control (iii) Lack of adequate scientific planning in making police arrangement to deal with crowd with proper sectoral deployment, and lack of proper wireless deployment (iv) Ineptitude of the police in effectively managing the crowd and enforcing prohibitory orders **(b) Surveillance:** (i) Lack of adequate observation towers with proper wireless communication to monitor and regulate crowd (ii) Lack of adequate CCTV surveillance of the crowd (iii) Absence of public announcement systems or effective wireless system with the police; **(c) Infrastructure:** (i) Lack of adequate road opening parties to secure the routes (ii) Lack of adequate metal detectors and frisking of pilgrims entering the pilgrimage area or persons entering the gathering area.
Lack of Coordination between Stakeholders	This includes the following issues: (a) Coordination gap between agencies (e.g. Police and District Magistrate; PWD, Fire Service, Forest officials, Revenue officials, Medical officers etc.) (b) Poor infrastructure (Plans on paper but no implementation due to lack of funds, resources, or will). (c) Inadequate water, medical assistance, public transport/parking facilities. (d) Communication delays (e) Vacant/late/delayed posting of key personnel.

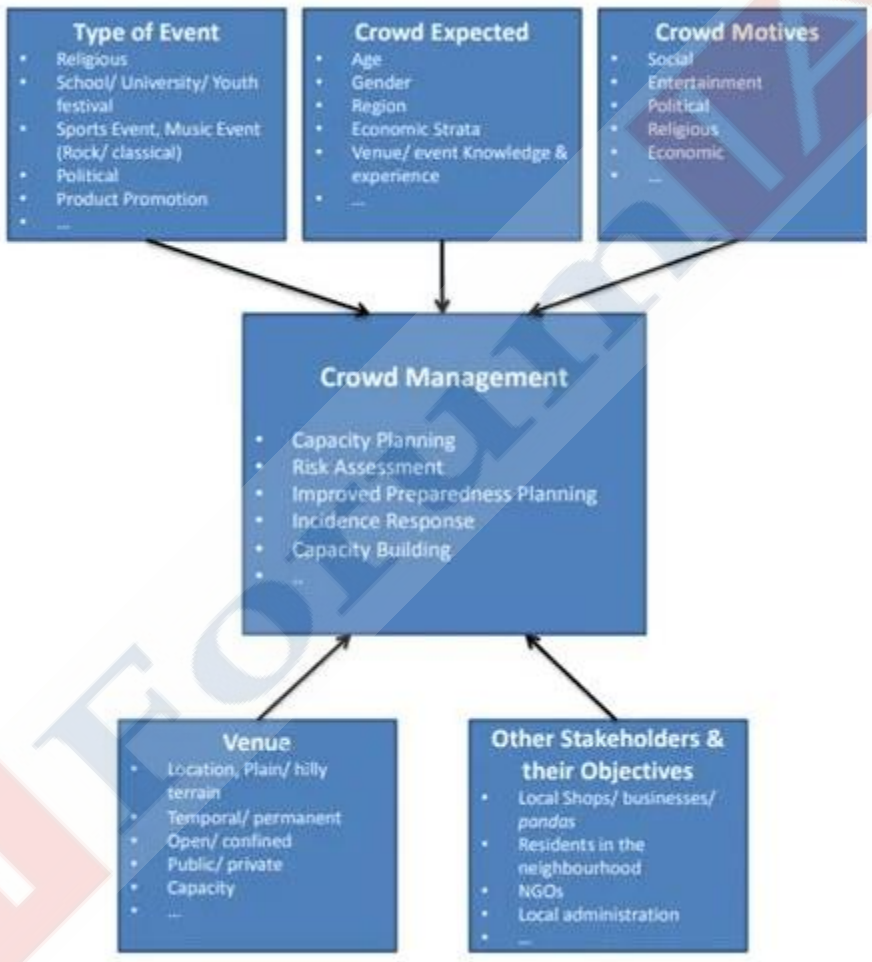
What are the Impact of these Stampedes?

1. **Trauma and Loss:** Witnessing a stampede tragedy and the resultant deaths and injuries causes immense trauma, especially for those who lost loved ones. **For e.g.** Deadly stampede killing 121 people in Hathras.
2. **Economic Hardship:** The majority of victims in such stampedes come from lower castes and poor backgrounds. Their deaths leave families without primary breadwinners, causing economic hardship in the community. Also the cost of funerals and medical expenses further strain already limited resources.

3. **Erosion of Trust:** Repeated stampedes at Indian religious festivals due to similar failures further undermine faith in the ability of organizers to keep devotees safe. **For e.g.** Gross negligence like poor planning, with insufficient exits, inadequate crowd control, and lack of emergency preparedness, by organizers and authorities erodes trust in religious institutions.
4. **Loss of Social and Human Capital:** Many young children and women are the victims of these stampede tragedies. This leads to loss of the productive social and human capital of the country.

What are the NDMA Guidelines for the prevention of Stampedes in India?

In view of the recurring stampedes at places of mass gathering, including religious places, and typically ad-hoc responses to those, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has prepared '**Suggestive Framework for Preparation of Crowd Management Plan for Events/Venues of Mass Gathering**'.



Source- NDMA

Understanding venue, visitors and stakeholders	It requires understanding of: 1. Type of event (such as religious, schools/ university, sports event, music event, political event). 2. Expected Crowd (age, gender, economic strata) 3. Crowd Motives (such as social, academic, religious, entertainment, economic etc.) 4. Venue (location, topography of area, temporal or permanent, open or closed) 5. Role of other stakeholders (such as NGOs, neighbours of event venue, local administrators etc.)
Crowd Handling	1. Proper regulation of Traffic around the mass gathering venues. 2. A route map for venues along with emergency exits route maps. 3. Barricade facility to control the movement of crowd queues. 4. Snake line approach should be followed in case large crowd queues 5. The organizers of crowded events/venue managers should discourage general admissions and have plans to handle VIP visitors.
Safety and Security	1. The venue Organisers should ensure authorised use of electricity, use of fire safety extinguishers as per the safety guidelines. 2. Use of CCTV cameras to monitor crowds and use of mini UAV in case of big crowd spread.
Communication	A public address system, with loudspeakers installed at all crowded points, to communicate with the crowds.
Medical and Emergency care	Medical first-aid rooms and emergency operations centres to handle post-disaster emergencies should be set up
Role of Event Managers	The event organizers and venue managers should develop, implement, review and revise the disaster management plan in coordination with others including local administration and police.
Role of Civil society	Event/venue managers should involve NGOs and civil defence in traffic control, people flow control, medical assistance, sanitation and mobilization of local resources in case of disaster.
Role of police	The police should actively participate in venue assessment and preparedness checks and guide crowd and traffic movements.

Role of Media	1. **Educational**: Media can educate public about the possible disaster threats, ways to prevent them and how to be better prepared in the face of a disaster. 2. **Critical:** Media can critically evaluate the disaster management plans to highlight the gaps for correction.
Capacity Building	Capacity building, conduction of drills, periodic assessment of training of security personnel, police is essential to prevent crowd disasters

Use of ICT in Stampede Management:

ICT for Disaster mitigation and Prevention	**ICT in Disaster response and relief**
Technology • GIS, Remote Sensing • Radio, Television, telephone • SMS, UMS, Cell Broadcasting, Internet/Social Media • RFID • Space based sensors and balloons	Technology • PA system, SMS, UMS, Cell Broadcasting, Inter-operability of mobile service providers • Emergency lighting, alarms • RFID Tags • Registration database software • Space based sensors and balloons
Typical Usage • Early warning system, Potential Risks, Vulnerabilities • Registration of visitors, Virtual Queues, RFID • Information dissemination • To regulate flow of visitors • Prepositioning of resources	Typical Usage • To ensure rumours do not spread • Registering missing persons • Search and rescue • Keeping track of relief organizations, Camps of displaced persons • Insurance processing • Resource inventory management

Source- NDMA Guidelines for ICT use in Disaster Management

What are the Challenges in the implementation of these Guidelines?

1. **Lack of adoption and implementation:** The state governments and local authorities have not yet properly implemented the NDMA guidelines on crowd management.
2. **Rapidly rising population:** With rising population and rapid urbanization, urban areas have become more susceptible along with places of frequent mass gatherings like temples.
3. **Greater tolerance to crowd:** According to several psychologists, there is very high tolerance for crowded places in India, because Indians don't feel uncomfortable until it's very packed. Hence, large-scale events in India become more susceptible to stampedes because of a greater tolerance for high-density crowds.

4. **Governance and accountability:** Agencies responsible for issuing permissions/ licences for mass gatherings, events often fail to follow the guidelines and the requirements. Further, there is lack of accountability on part of the authorities.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Legislation, Rules and Regulations for Stampedes:** Supreme Court in Uphaar Cinema Tragedy observed that there is a need for a comprehensive legislation dealing with tortuous liability of the State.
2. **Specialisation and Professionalism:** India needs to emphasize effective communication, sensitive on-ground interventions, specialized personnel training, safety insurance, online customer feedback system, transparency, statutory compliances and professionalism, to maintain the decorum of the crowd in huge events.
3. **Use of technology:** Latest technology such as CCTV surveillance with HD IP cameras with VMS (Video Management Software), mobile control room, drones for roof level surveillance and public address system, face recognition among crowds and robotic support should be deployed extensively in crowded places.
4. **Capacity Evaluation:** There should be proper evaluation of the capacity of a location or structure before holding mass gatherings. Existing infrastructural problem should be addressed to avoid mishaps.
5. **Crowd Behaviour Management:** Every mass event must have a public address system for the officials to stop rumours from getting out of hand, calm panicking crowds, and help people exit in a systematic manner.
6. **Penalties:** Stricter penalties, revocation of licenses for construction/fire safety violations, random checks and inspections, must be adopted ensure effective compliance.
7. **Engaging Civil Society:** The Local Civilian Organisations like NGOs must be actively engaged in the event for capacity building of event managers etc, for easy mobilization of local resources, better preparedness and traffic control.
8. **Learning from Global Best Practices:** The learnings from Global Best Practices in Crowd Management must be adopted for effective management of Stampedes in India. **For e.g.** Crowd management during Haj Pilgrimage in Makkah.

Read More: The Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3 Disaster Management

Internet Access as Fundamental Right – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise



The Supreme Court's recent judgment recognising the right to access and use the internet as a fundamental right marks a significant step in the evolution of digital rights in India. It highlights the growing importance of internet access in ensuring freedom of expression, access to education and the effective exercise of other fundamental rights.

What did the Supreme Court observe in its recent judgment recognising internet access as a fundamental right in India?

In its October 15, 2026 judgment in **Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish**, the Supreme Court made the following key observations:

1. **Fundamental Right**: The right to access and use the internet is a fundamental right under **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), read with **Article 19(1)(a)** (Freedom of Speech and Expression).
2. **Children's Rights**: Children enjoy this right irrespective of their age. Their online safety cannot be ensured by completely denying them internet access.
3. **Access to Information and Education**: The internet is an important medium for accessing information, expressing ideas and pursuing education, particularly for children in remote areas and those with special needs
4. **Rejection of Blanket Restrictions**: The Court cautioned against blanket bans on children's internet use, observing that such restrictions may push them towards less regulated platforms and discourage them from reporting online abuse.
5. **Protection of Privacy**: The Court expressed concerns that age-based restrictions could require continuous collection of sensitive personal data, creating risks of surveillance and misuse.

6. **Need for Proportionate Safeguards**: The Court emphasised that measures should target harmful content and those responsible for creating or circulating it, rather than depriving children of internet access altogether.

What are some other important Supreme Court judgments related to internet access and digital rights in India?

Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020)	The Court held that freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to carry on trade or business through the internet are constitutionally protected under Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g). It also ruled that indefinite internet shutdowns are impermissible and restrictions must satisfy proportionality requirements.
Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)	The Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, for being unconstitutional and violating freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a).
K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)	The Court recognised the **right to privacy** as a fundamental right under Article 21 and Part III of the Constitution. This has important implications for data protection, online privacy and surveillance.

What is the significance of recognising internet access as a fundamental right?

1. **Strengthens Fundamental Rights**: Recognising internet access as a fundamental right reinforces the connection between Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) and Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression), enabling citizens to access information, express opinions and participate in democratic processes.
2. **Promotes Digital Inclusion**: Recognising internet access as a fundamental right can help bridge the digital divide by improving access to information, education and essential online services for rural populations, marginalised communities and persons with disabilities.
3. **Ensures Access to Education**: Recognising internet access as a fundamental right promotes equal educational opportunities by enabling students to access online classes, digital libraries and educational resources, particularly in rural and remote areas. For e.g. initiatives like **DIKSHA** provide digital learning materials to students across India.
4. **Enhances Freedom of Expression**: Internet access enables citizens to express their opinions, share ideas and participate in public debates, thereby strengthening Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. For e.g. social media platforms allow citizens to raise awareness about social issues and government policies.
5. **Improves Access to Public Services**: Internet access enables citizens to avail themselves of government services such as Aadhaar, online certificates, welfare benefits and digital payments. It promotes transparency, reduces bureaucratic delays and improves last-mile delivery of public services, particularly in rural and remote areas.
6. **Promotes Economic Opportunities**: Access to the internet enables individuals to explore online employment, entrepreneurship, digital markets and skill-development opportunities, thereby promoting livelihood generation and economic empowerment. For e.g. platforms such as the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) help small businesses access wider markets.
7. **Protects the Rights of Children**: Recognising internet access as a fundamental right ensures that children can access online education, information and learning opportunities while promoting their

overall development. It also highlights the need to protect children from online harms without imposing blanket restrictions on internet use.

8. **Balances Freedom with Online Safety**: The judgment emphasises that online risks should be addressed through proportionate safeguards rather than blanket restrictions on internet access, thereby protecting both individual freedom and online safety. For e.g. age-appropriate content filters and measures against cyberbullying can help protect children without denying them access to online education and information.

What are the major challenges in ensuring universal internet access in India?

1. **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to the internet between urban and rural areas, as well as across income groups, limits digital inclusion. For e.g. people in remote villages often face weaker connectivity and fewer internet facilities than those living in cities, restricting their access to online education, healthcare and government services.
2. **Poor Digital Infrastructure**: Inadequate broadband connectivity, limited mobile towers and unreliable electricity supply hinder internet access in rural, remote and hilly regions. For e.g. several remote villages face network connectivity issues, limiting access to online education, telemedicine and e-governance services.
3. **High Cost of Devices**: The high cost of smartphones, computers and other internet-enabled devices prevents economically weaker sections from accessing digital services. For e.g. low-income students may be unable to afford smartphones or laptops required for online classes, limiting their access to digital education and learning resources.
4. **Low Digital Literacy**: Lack of digital skills prevents people from effectively using internet-based services, even where connectivity is available. For e.g. some rural citizens may struggle to use the UMANG app to access government services or may fall victim to UPI fraud due to limited awareness of online safety practices.
5. **Language Barriers**: Limited availability of digital content, government websites and online services in regional languages restricts internet access for non-English-speaking populations. For e.g. a rural farmer who cannot understand English-language agricultural advisories may struggle to access information on weather forecasts, crop insurance and government schemes, thereby limiting the benefits of digital inclusion.
6. **Cybersecurity and Privacy Risks**: Online fraud, identity theft, cyberbullying and misuse of personal data discourage people from using the internet. For e.g. digital arrest scams in India, in which fraudsters impersonate law-enforcement officials and threaten victims through video calls to extort money, undermine public trust in digital platforms.
7. **Affordability of Continued Access**: Although internet data rates in India are relatively low, recurring expenses on data recharges, smartphones and electricity can burden low-income households, forcing them to limit their internet usage. For e.g. a rural student from an economically weaker family may struggle to afford regular mobile data recharges needed to attend online classes and access digital study materials.

What measures should be taken to ensure affordable and equitable internet access in India?

1. **Expand Digital Infrastructure**: The government should strengthen broadband networks and mobile connectivity in rural, remote and underserved areas through initiatives such as BharatNet, which aims to provide broadband connectivity to Gram Panchayats. This would reduce the urban–rural digital divide and ensure equitable internet access for all citizens.
2. **Provide Affordable Internet Plans**: The government should encourage telecom operators to offer low-cost data plans and special packages for students and economically weaker sections to reduce the financial burden of regular internet usage.

3. **Subsidise Digital Devices**: The government should provide subsidised smartphones, tablets and computers to students and economically weaker sections to reduce the digital divide. For e.g. state-level initiatives such as Tamil Nadu's free laptop scheme for students demonstrate how device support can improve access to digital education and online learning resources.
4. **Promote Public Wi-Fi**: Expanding public Wi-Fi hotspots in villages, schools, libraries and community centres can provide low-cost internet access to people who cannot afford regular data recharges. For e.g. **PM-WANI** (Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) scheme promotes public Wi-Fi hotspots, enabling affordable internet connectivity and supporting digital inclusion.
5. **Improve Digital Literacy**: The government should strengthen digital literacy programmes to enable citizens, particularly rural populations and disadvantaged groups, to use the internet safely and effectively. For e.g. **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** aimed to impart digital literacy to rural households, helping people access online education, digital payments and government services.
6. **Promote Regional-Language Content**: Developing websites, educational materials and e-governance services in regional languages can overcome language barriers and make internet access more inclusive. For e.g. the Government's **BHASHINI** initiative uses AI-based language technologies to facilitate access to digital services in Indian languages, particularly for non-English-speaking citizens.
7. **Strengthen Cybersecurity and Privacy**: Strengthening data protection laws, cybersecurity infrastructure and grievance-redressal mechanisms can build public trust in digital services and encourage wider internet adoption. The effective implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, along with awareness campaigns against online fraud, can help protect users' personal information and promote safer internet access.

Conclusion: India must move beyond mere internet connectivity towards meaningful universal access by ensuring that every citizen can afford, access and safely use the internet, irrespective of income, gender or geographical location.

UPSC GS-2: Indian Polity
Read More: Indian Express

UN Reforms – Need & Challenges – Explained Pointwise



Reforming the United Nations (UN) is one of the most critical and complex challenges in global governance today. While the UN remains indispensable, its structure, particularly its most powerful bodies, often fails to reflect the realities of the 21st century.

Introduction:

- **UN reforms** refer to proposed and ongoing changes meant to make the United Nations more effective, representative, transparent, and responsive to current global realities.
- The calls for reform span core UN organs, especially the Security Council, as well as the organization's operational and financial structures.

What are the key issues necessitating reforms in the United Nations?

1. **Lack of equitable representation**: The UN Security Council does not adequately reflect the current geopolitical and economic realities, particularly the growing role of developing countries. Countries like India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan, and regions such as Africa and Latin America, have long called for permanent representation to reflect modern realities and give a greater voice to developing nations. For e.g. India, despite being the world's most populous country, does not have permanent membership in the Security Council.
2. **Outdated Power Structure:** The UN Security Council (UNSC) is dominated by five permanent members (P5: US, UK, France, Russia, China) with veto powers – a structure set in 1945 that now fails to reflect shifts in global power, the rise of developing nations, and the interests of the Global South.
3. **Veto power of permanent members**: The veto power of the five permanent members (P5) can obstruct collective action, even when a majority of countries support a resolution. For e.g. repeated

vetoes by the US on Gaza-related resolutions have highlighted how veto power can hinder collective action on international peace and security.

4. **Ineffectiveness in preventing conflicts**: The UN has often struggled to prevent or resolve prolonged conflicts due to geopolitical rivalries and a lack of consensus among major powers. For e.g. the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has exposed the limitations of the Security Council when a permanent member is directly involved in a conflict.
5. **Inability to address emerging global challenges**: The UN's existing institutional mechanisms often struggle to respond effectively to emerging challenges such as climate change, cyber threats, pandemics and artificial intelligence, highlighting the need for stronger international cooperation and institutional reforms. For e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in global health coordination and preparedness.
6. **General Assembly Marginalization**: Although the UN General Assembly (UNGA) represents all 193 member states equally, its resolutions are non-binding, unlike UNSC decisions. Rebalancing authority between the General Assembly and the Security Council is a persistent demand from developing nations.
7. **Bureaucratic Inefficiency:** The UN's complicated bureaucratic structure often slows emergency response and suffers from corruption, misuse of funds, or poor accountability. Redundant agencies, overlapping mandates, and heavy administrative processes hinder rapid response to emerging global crises.
8. **Financial Constraints:** The UN faces funding shortages and delays in member-state contributions, which affects its ability to implement peacekeeping, humanitarian and development programmes effectively. Its reliance on a few donors, especially the US, leads to budgetary crises, and concerns about undue influence in UN affairs.
9. **Erosion of Legitimacy and Emergence of Competitors:** The UN's inability to prevent or resolve prolonged conflicts weakens public confidence in its effectiveness. Its failures to act on major crises push the member states toward regional or ad hoc coalitions (G20, BRICS, African Union), bypassing the UN and weakening its global leadership.

What are the major reform proposals & ongoing initiatives?

UNSC Expansion and Veto Reform	1. **New Permanent Members (P6-P11):** The current permanent five (P5: China, France, Russia, UK, US) do not include major modern economic, demographic, or political powers. Leading candidates for new permanent seats include: ○ **India:** The world's most populous country and a major global economy. ○ **Brazil:** The leading voice in Latin America. ○ **Germany** and **Japan:** Major financial contributors to the UN and global powers. ○ **An African Seat:** A consensus candidate or rotation among key African nations (e.g. Nigeria, South Africa) to represent the entire continent. 2. **Ezulwini Consensus:** African nations demand **2 permanent seats** (with full veto rights) and **3 additional non-permanent seats** for African nations. This framework stresses correcting the historical exclusion of the continent. 3. **Uniting for Consensus (UfC Coalition):** Led by countries like Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, South Korea, and Türkiye, this group opposes new permanent seats. Instead, it advocates for expanding only non-permanent seats with longer, renewable terms to allow wider representation.

	4. **Limit or Reform Veto:** Restrict veto use (especially in cases of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity) with proposals for supermajority or General Assembly referral for overrides. 5. **Increase Non-Permanent Seats:** More seats for under-represented regions to distribute influence and reflect global demographics.
Streamlining Bureaucracy & Decision Making	1. **UN80 Initiative:** Launched by UN Secretary-General in 2025, the initiative aims to reduce duplication, streamline administrative processes and improve coordination across the UN system. 2. **Increase Transparency and Accountability:** Stricter auditing, performance reviews, and publication of program assessments; better mechanisms to address fraud, misconduct, and resource misuse.
Financial Reform	1. **Equitable Assessment & Burden Sharing:** Update member contribution formulas based on GDP, population, and development indicators; build in accountability for arrears and fiscal discipline. 2. **Link Membership to Contributions:** Greater privileges or representation for consistent contributors to peacekeeping, aid, or development.
Inclusive Voice and Representation	1. **Institutionalize Global South Forums:** Permanent coalitions (e.g. G4, African Union blocks) within UN organs to negotiate as regional blocs and ensure developing country priorities are addressed. 2. **Text-Based Negotiations:** Adopt clear deadlines and rounds for reform discussions, preventing procedural delays. 3. **Pact for the Future (2024)**: Adopted at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, it seeks to strengthen multilateral cooperation, reform global governance and make international institutions more inclusive and effective.

What are the major challenges associated with reforming the United Nations?

1. **Resistance from Permanent Members**: The five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council may oppose reforms that could dilute their existing power, privileges and influence over global decision-making. For e.g. Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, any amendment requires ratification by all five permanent members, this gives each P5 member an effective veto over Charter amendments, making reforms such as expanding the Security Council difficult despite growing demands for greater representation.
2. **Lack of Consensus Among Member States**: UN member states have divergent national interests, geopolitical priorities and visions of global governance, making it difficult to reach a consensus on reforms. For e.g. disagreements over expanding the UN Security Council, including resistance from some countries to granting permanent seats to emerging powers such as India, have stalled progress on reforming the Council.
3. **Internal Disagreements Within Blocs:** Regional groups struggle to unite behind single candidates. For instance, while the African Union demands two permanent seats under the Ezulwini Consensus, member states have not agreed on which specific African nations (e.g. Nigeria, South Africa, or Egypt) would hold those seats.

4. **Geopolitical & Regional Rivalries**:
    - Major powers often prioritise their strategic interests over collective global goals, making consensus on UN reforms difficult. For e.g. Rivalries between the US, Russia and China hinder cooperation on several international issues.
    - Historical tensions between neighbouring countries obstruct agreement on regional representation in the Security Council. For e.g. Rivalries between India and Pakistan complicate discussions on South Asian representation.
5. **Disagreement over Veto Power**: The five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council enjoy veto power, which often becomes a major obstacle to UN reforms. While developing countries demand its abolition or restriction, the P5 are reluctant to dilute their privileges.
6. **Complexity of the UN Charter Amendment Process**: Article 108 of the UN Charter requires amendments to be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN member states, including all five permanent members of the Security Council. Achieving a supermajority among 193 sovereign states with widely divergent political systems, economic priorities, and alliance networks makes reaching consensus nearly impossible.

What measures should be taken to make UN reforms more effective and achievable?

1. **Build Consensus Among Member States**: Strengthen diplomatic dialogue between developed and developing countries to bridge differences over the nature and scope of UN reforms. For e.g. the G4 countries and the African Union must work towards reconciling their proposals for UN Security Council expansion to build wider support.
2. **Reform the UN Security Council**: Expand the Council's permanent and non-permanent membership to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and ensure equitable geographical representation. For e.g. India's demand for permanent membership seeks to make the Council more representative of the Global South.
3. **Address Concerns of Permanent Members**: Engage the P5 countries through sustained diplomatic negotiations to address their concerns over power-sharing, veto privileges and the proposed expansion of the UN Security Council. Gradual, mutually acceptable reforms can help build consensus while preserving the effectiveness of the UN.
4. **Improve Decision-Making Efficiency**: Simplify bureaucratic procedures, establish time-bound decision-making mechanisms and promote consensus-based negotiations to enable the UN to respond swiftly to global crises.
5. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability**: Introduce regular performance reviews, transparent decision-making procedures and independent audits of UN bodies to ensure accountability in their functioning. This would strengthen public trust, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and improve the effectiveness of the organisation.
6. **Strengthen the General Assembly**: Enhance the role of the UN General Assembly in global governance by improving the implementation of its resolutions, strengthening oversight of UN bodies and promoting inclusive discussions on international issues. This would make UN decision-making more transparent, participatory and accountable.
7. **Integrate Regional Organizations:** Formalize operational partnerships with regional entities (e.g. African Union, ASEAN, European Union) under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, delegating peace-keeping and dispute mediation to actors with direct local context and legitimacy.

Conclusion: UN reform faces formidable roadblocks from entrenched power structures, competing national interests, high legal thresholds, organizational inertia, and lack of unified political will. Overcoming these challenges requires sustained global diplomacy, balancing realism and idealism to adapt the UN for contemporary global governance.

UPSC GS-2: International relations
Read More: The Indian Express

Climate Reparation: Loss and Damage – Explained Pointwise



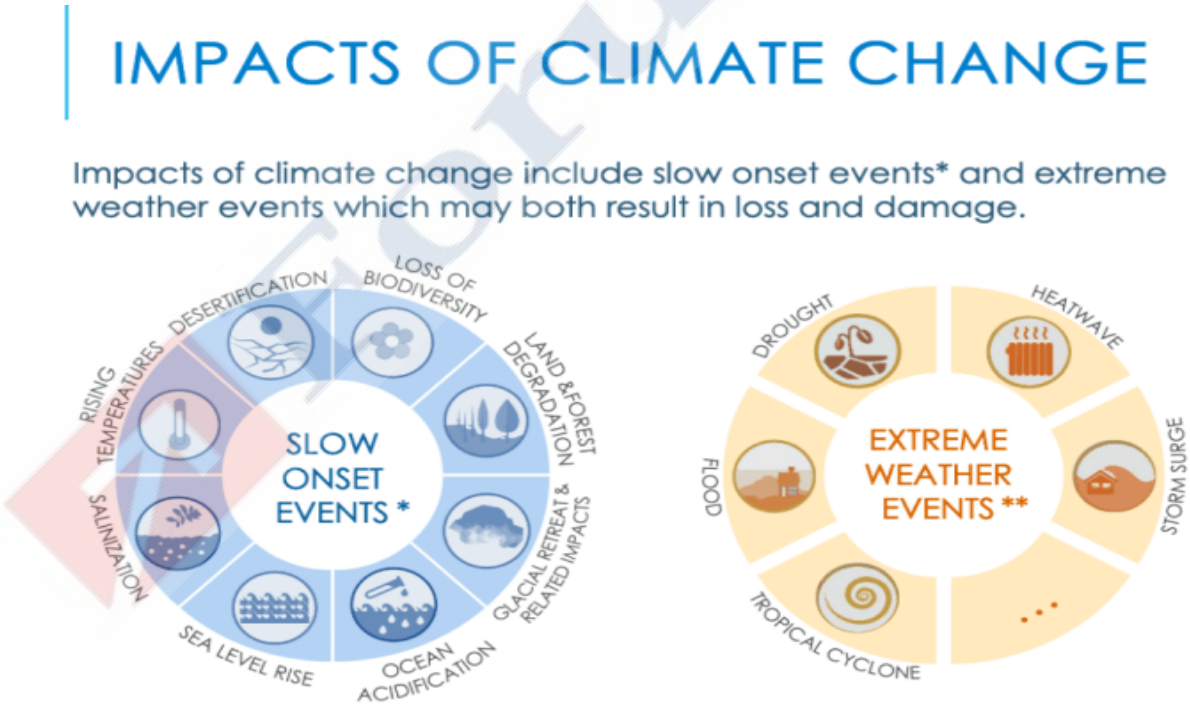
A newly established international climate fund, aimed at providing financial assistance to countries affected by climate-related disasters, recently decided to allocate US$20 million to Nepal to support its recovery from the devastating flash floods in August, making it the first country to receive international funding for Loss and Damage.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, as climate change is becoming evident. Climate Reparations (or Loss and Damage) has been demanded by many developing countries, most notably, by small island States. Developing countries have very little historic contribution to Green House Gas (GHG) emissions that are responsible for global warming and climate change. However, they are most vulnerable to extreme events due to climate change.
Since the formation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), vulnerable nations have been calling on developed countries to provide financial assistance that can help them address loss and damage due to climate change.

What is 'Loss and Damage'?

Events occurring due to climate change are having a deep impact on human lives and economic activities. It has increased the frequency of **extreme weather events** like floods, cyclones etc. It is also contributing to **slow onset events** like desertification, loss of biodiversity, sea level rise and ocean acidification etc.





Source: UNFCCC, Guide to Loss and Damage

These events due to climate change are responsible for both **economic** and **non-economic losses**. Economic losses can be measured in monetary terms e.g. damage to infrastructure/property or agriculture production (in INR or US$). Non-economic losses are intangible and can't be accurately measured in monetary terms e.g. loss of human life, bio-diversity, cultural heritage or indigenous knowledge. For instance, Communities in Kosrae, Micronesia, have lost burial grounds due to coastal erosion caused by sea level rise. Loss of sea ice in the Arctic has affected the cultural identity and hunting practices among Inuit communities.



Source: UNFCCC, Guide to Loss and Damage

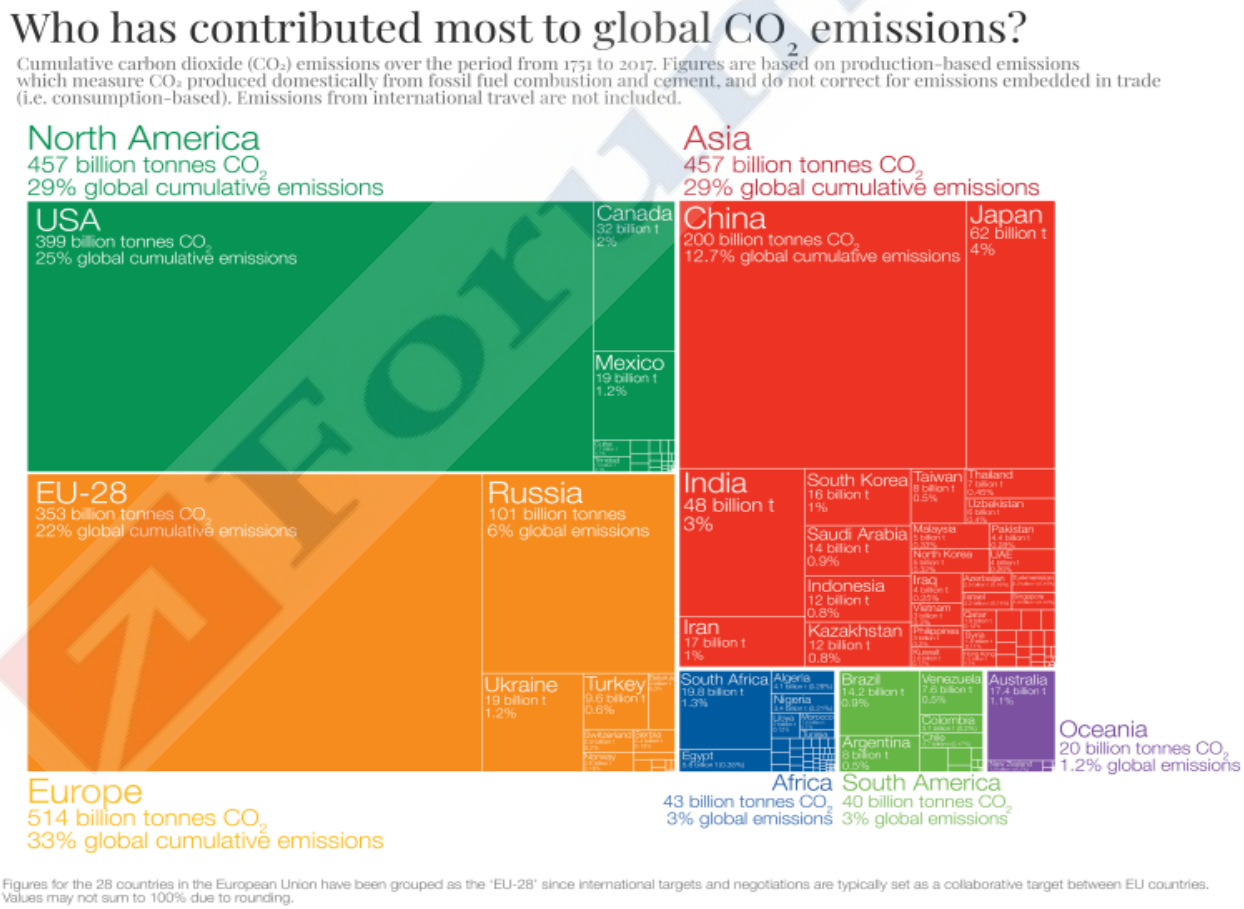
- People, communities and nations can adapt to some of these events. For other events, adaptation is not possible, or there is a lack of resources to adapt.
- There is no official definition of '**Loss and damage**'. It is a general term used in UN climate negotiations to refer to the consequences of climate change that go beyond what people can adapt to; or when adaptation is possible but a community doesn't have the resources to access or utilise them. A close definition is found in the literature review commissioned by the UNFCCC.

UNFCCC (2012)	**Loss**	**Damage**
	The negative impacts in relation to which **reparation or restoration is impossible**, such as loss of freshwater resources.	The negative impacts in relation to **which reparation or restoration is possible**, such as windstorm damage to the roof of a building, or damage to a coastal mangrove forest as a result of coastal surges.

- The **developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change events**, both due to **frequency of events** as well as **lack of resources to adapt**. According to a study, 6 of the world's 10 most affected countries (between 1996-2015) by extreme weather events were in Asia. Under the Loss and Damage framework, **developing countries demand compensation from developed countries for losses/damages suffered due to climate change events**.
- Two vital arguments in the context of Loss and Damage are "**Historic Emissions Argument**" and "**Polluter Pays Principle**".

'Historical Emissions' and 'Polluter Pays':

- At its core, the demand for compensation for loss and damage from climate disasters is an extension of the universally acknowledged "Polluter Pays" principle that **makes the polluter liable** for paying not just for the **cost of remedial action**, but also for **compensating the victims** of environmental damage caused by their actions.
- In the climate change framework, the burden of responsibility falls on developed countries that have contributed most of the greenhouse gas emissions since 1750 (considered to be the beginning of the industrial age). The United States and the European Union, including the UK, account for ~47% of all emissions since 1750. Inclusion of Russia, Canada, Japan and Australia takes this contribution to ~60%.



Source: *Our World in Data*

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- Historical responsibility is important because carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for hundreds of years (300-1000 years according to NASA). It is the cumulative accumulation of carbon dioxide that causes global warming. India, currently the 3rd largest emitter, accounts for only 3% of historical emissions.
- Developing Countries that have had negligible contributions to historical emissions and have severe limitations of resources are the ones that face the most devastating impacts of climate change. Hence they demand climate reparations from developed countries.

What is the difference between mitigation, adaptation and addressing Loss and Damage?

- Under the Paris Climate Agreement, countries recognized the importance of '**averting**, **minimising** and **addressing**' loss and damage.
- Loss and damage can be 'averted' by **curbing greenhouse gas emissions** (**mitigation**). It can be 'minimised' by **taking preemptive action to protect communities** from the consequences of climate change (**adaptation**).
- 'Addressing' loss and damage is the third pillar of climate action: helping people **after they have experienced climate-related impacts**.
- Climate adaptation measures include:
    - Protecting communities from sea level rise by helping them move to higher ground.
    - Preparing for extreme weather disasters by investing in early warning systems.
    - Protecting food supplies.
    - Switching to drought-resistant crops among others.
- Loss and damage happens when efforts to reduce emissions are not ambitious enough and when adaptation efforts are unsuccessful or impossible to implement, sometimes due to limited resources.
- The IPCC's 6th Assessment Report (WGII) observes that as the magnitude of climate change increases, the ability to adaptation decreases. It has defined soft and hard adaptation limits.
    - '**Soft Adaptation Limits**' are when adaptation options exist but communities don't have the financial resources needed to adopt them.
    - '**Hard Adaptation Limits**' are those when climate change becomes so extreme that no amount of resources can avert or minimize loss and damage.
- Coral reefs offer a good example of where adaptation is likely to reach its limits. The IPCC found that 70-90% of tropical coral reefs will die by mid-century even if temperature rise is limited to 1.5°C (and nearly total loss under the 2°C scenario). This will lead to irreversible losses of biodiversity and have a major impact on coastal communities that eat and sell fish that live along the reefs.

Read More: The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (Part 2) – Explained, pointwise

How has the concept of Loss and Damage evolved over the years?

- At the drafting stage of the UNFCCC in 1991, it was proposed by the Alliance of Small Island States to create an insurance scheme to provide financial resources to countries impacted by rising sea levels. Each country would contribute resources according their relative contribution to global emissions. The proposal was rejected, and Loss and Damage was not mentioned in the Framework Convention adopted in 1992.
- Loss and damage first appeared in the negotiated outcome of the UN climate talks in 2007 as part of the **Bali Action Plan**. In 2013, **Warsaw International Mechanism** (WIM) was formed to avert, minimise and address loss and damage. The WIM has been mandated to **share knowledge**, **strengthen dialogues** among stakeholders and **mobilise expertise** to enhance action and support to

address loss and damage. But **neither the WIM nor any other established mechanism delivers funding** to help countries manage loss and damage.

- Loss and Damage is mentioned in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement. However, there is no reference to provision of finance for climate reparation/compemsation in this Article.
- At COP26 in Glasgow, a large coalition of climate-vulnerable countries advocated for creating a new finance facility or fund dedicated to loss and damage. The proposal for loss and damage financing was once again rejected by developed countries. A 2-year **Glasgow Dialogue** was established at the COP26. It will discuss possible arrangements for loss and damage funding. It was also agreed to **operationalise and fund the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage** (SNLD).

Santiago Network on Loss and Damage (SNLD):
The Santiago Network is a network to enable Loss and Damage fund flow from developed to developing countries. It will work towards the implementation of relevant approaches at the local, national and regional level, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

- The first session of the Glasgow Dialogue took place at the Bonn UN climate negotiations in June 2022. In Bonn, the developed nations acknowledged the need to deal with loss and damage, but didn't commit on any steps they would be willing to take to address the problem. The negotiations also saw limited progress on how to design the SNLD.

What actions has the international community taken to address Loss and Damage?

1. **Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), COP19 (2013)**: The Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) was established at the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP19) to the UNFCCC in Warsaw, Poland, in 2013 to address loss and damage associated with the impacts of climate change, particularly in vulnerable developing countries. The WIM marked an important step in recognising Loss and Damage as a distinct pillar of international climate action alongside mitigation and adaptation.
2. **Santiago Network, COP25 (2019)**: Established at COP25 under the UNFCCC to catalyse technical assistance for developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. It helps these countries avert, minimise and address Loss and Damage by connecting them with relevant organisations, experts and technical assistance providers to assess climate risks, develop strategies and strengthen their capacity to respond to climate-related disasters and slow-onset events.
3. **Glasgow Climate Pact, COP26 (2021)**: It called for enhanced global climate action and established the **Glasgow Dialogue** to discuss arrangements for funding activities to avert, minimise and address Loss and Damage in developing countries. It also urged developed countries to at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation to developing countries from 2019 levels by 2025.
4. **Establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund, COP27 (2022)**: At the COP27, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022, countries agreed to establish a dedicated **Loss and Damage Fund** to assist vulnerable developing countries in addressing the adverse impacts of climate change. The fund aims to provide financial support for economic and non-economic losses caused by climate-related disasters, such as floods, cyclones, droughts and sea-level rise.
5. **Operationalisation of the fund, COP28 (2023)**: At COP28 (2023) in Dubai, the Loss and Damage Fund was operationalised to provide financial assistance to vulnerable developing countries facing the adverse impacts of climate change.

6. **COP29, Baku (2024)**: The COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2024, made progress towards addressing climate-related Loss and Damage by advancing the operationalisation of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. COP29 also adopted a new climate finance goal of at least US $300 billion annually by 2035 for developing countries, with a broader ambition to scale up finance from all sources to US$ 1.3 trillion annually.

What are the key challenges associated with Loss and Damage due to climate change?

1. **Major financial gap**: The funding available through the Loss and Damage Fund is far below the estimated needs of developing countries. The cost of climate-related losses in these countries could reach US$290–580 billion annually by 2030.
2. **Disagreement over climate responsibility**: Developed and developing countries differ over who should bear the financial burden. Developing countries emphasise historical emissions and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).
3. **Lack of a universally accepted definition**: There is no universally agreed operational definition that clearly distinguishes Loss and Damage from adaptation, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. This complicates funding eligibility and allocation.
4. **Difficulty in measuring losses**: Economic losses, such as damage to infrastructure and crops, can be estimated relatively easily. However, quantifying the loss of human lives, biodiversity, cultural heritage and traditional knowledge is much more difficult.
5. **Attribution of climate change**: It can be difficult to determine how much damage from a particular flood, cyclone or drought is attributable to human-induced climate change rather than natural variability or other factors.
6. **Delayed and complicated access to finance**: Vulnerable countries often face complex application procedures, accreditation requirements, limited technical capacity and administrative barriers when seeking international climate finance.

What should be done going ahead?

1. **Enhance climate finance**: Developed countries and other contributors should mobilise adequate, predictable and additional financial resources to address climate-related Loss and Damage in vulnerable developing countries. Greater emphasis should be placed on grants rather than loans to prevent further debt burdens. Moreover, simplifying access to the Loss and Damage Fund, ensuring transparent disbursement and encouraging innovative financing mechanisms are essential to bridge the funding gap and promote climate justice.
2. **Strengthen the Loss and Damage Fund**: The international community should ensure adequate, predictable and additional financial contributions to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage. Simplifying access procedures, prioritising vulnerable developing countries and providing timely, grant-based assistance can help affected communities recover from climate-related disasters without increasing their debt burden.
3. **Promote climate justice**: The international community should uphold the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), recognising that developed countries have contributed a larger share of historical greenhouse gas emissions. They should provide adequate, predictable and additional financial and technical support to vulnerable developing countries to address climate-related Loss and Damage, ensuring equitable burden-sharing and protecting the interests of climate-vulnerable communities.
4. **Address non-economic losses**: Develop comprehensive frameworks to identify and address non-economic losses, such as loss of human lives, biodiversity, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge and traditional livelihoods. Strengthen community participation, document vulnerable cultural practices

and protect ecosystems to preserve cultural identity and ecological integrity, recognising that some irreversible losses cannot be adequately compensated through monetary assistance alone.

5. **Improve risk assessment**: Strengthen scientific research, climate modelling and early-warning systems to identify climate-vulnerable regions and estimate potential economic and non-economic losses. Developing comprehensive climate-risk databases and improving data-sharing among countries can help policymakers allocate resources effectively, prepare for extreme weather events and ensure timely assistance to affected communities.

Conclusion: Addressing Loss and Damage requires a shift from reactive disaster relief towards a comprehensive framework of climate justice, predictable finance, risk reduction and international solidarity.

Syllabus: GS III, Conservation, Environment Pollution and Degradation
Source: Indian Express, World Resources Institute

Obesity in India – Reasons & Impacts – Explained Pointwise



Childhood obesity is on the rise globally as a result of a shift towards the intake of foods that are high in fat & sugars and less energy-intensive recreational activities & transportation. According to the World Obesity Atlas, more than 40mn children in India are either overweight or obese. Hence, India now ranks second globally in the number of overweight & obese children. This trend is driven by sedentary lifestyles, urbanisation, and greater access to processed foods. Also, unlike the developed countries

where the dietary transition unfolded gradually over several decades, in India much of this shift has occurred in last 15 years.



Created By Forum IAS

What is obesity?

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity is defined as an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat that poses health risks.
- It is a medical condition that increases the risk of other health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and certain cancers.
- The most common screening tool for obesity is the **Body Mass Index (BMI)**.

How is obesity measured?

Adults over the age of 20 years	• **Obese:** Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m2 or more. • **Underweight:** Body Mass Index (BMI) is less than 18 kg/m2.
School-aged children and adolescents between 5 and 19 years	• **Obese-** BMI is two standard deviations more than the mean. • **Underweight-** BMI is two standard deviations below the mean.

NOTE: BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters

Data regarding obesity in India:

1. **More obese women as compared to men:** Obesity in women has increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022. There are 44 million women living with obesity in 2022.
2. **Increase in Men Obesity:** Obesity in men has increased by 4.9% from 1990 to 2022. There are 26 million men living with obesity in 2022.
3. **Significant Increase In Childhood Obesity:** The number of obese boys has increased from 0.2 million in 1990 to 7.3 million in 2022. The number of obese girls has increased from 0.2 million in 1990 to 5.2 million in 2022.

Data regarding underweight in India:

1. **Underweight Men and Women:** 13.7% of women and 12.5% of men were underweight.
2. **Underweight Children:** India has the highest number of underweight girls in the world. 20.3% of Indian girls are underweight. 21.7% of Indian boys are underweight, which is the second highest in the world.

Read More- Lancet study on Global Obesity rates

What are the reasons behind the increasing obesity in India?

1. **Unhealthy Lifestyle:** Lack of healthy lifestyle is a major reason for increasing obesity rates in India. **For e.g.** Lack of physical activities such as walks or gyms, lack of proper sleep.
2. **Lack of proper diet:** Cheaper and easily available junk food has replaced the nutritious food in the dietary intakes of Indian population. **For e.g.** According to recent Household Consumption Survey, Indians are spending less on cereals and pulses and more on beverages, refreshments and processed food.
3. **Increased income and urbanization:** Increased income levels have led to a rise in the consumption of foods high in fats, sugar and low physical activity.
4. **Lack of awareness:** There has been a general lack of awareness about healthy eating habits and the guidelines issued by FSSAI. Since Health is a state subject, there have been implementation challenges in ensuring proper implementation of FSSAI guidelines.
5. **Growth of Ultra-processed food industry:** Ultra processed food industry has boomed in India, leading to increased intake of transfat in India. According to a joint study conducted by WHO and ICRIER, India's ultra-processed food industry has grown at a CAGR of 13.37% in terms of retail sales value between 2011 and 2021.

6. **Obesity no longer dependent on economic capacity:** Obesity is no longer the disease of the rich in India. Eating junk food is cheaper and easier. **For e.g.** The cost of samosas and pakoras available at roadside shacks is less than fruit and vegetables.
7. **Generational burden**: According to a UNICEF Survey, the nutritional deficits among children are often a carryover of the poor dietary habits of their mothers.

What are the negative impacts of Obesity in India?

1. **Individual Health Implications:** Overweight adults and children are at greater risk for non-communicable diseases. According to WHO, excess bodyweight during childhood significantly increases the risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes & cardiovascular diseases later in life.
2. **Improper development of Children in formative years:** Obesity in children results in stunted physical and cognitive development.
3. **Psychosocial Impact:** Obese Individuals face psychosocial challenges like, body image issues and mental health concerns due to societal stigmas associated with weight.
4. **Economic Burden:** Obesity increases the economic burden due to productivity losses on account of decreased work efficiency and absenteeism.
5. **Public Health Challenges:** Obesity is a major reason behind the growth of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), like diabetes, cancer, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases etc. This has increased strain on the fragile public healthcare system in India.
6. **Social Inequality and Disparities:** Obesity perpetuates a cycle of health challenges and economic disadvantages among the vulnerable sections, exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities. Women are disproportionately affected by obesity, facing challenges related to reproductive health, maternal health, and overall well-being.

What are the government initiatives to reduce the obesity burden?

The government has launched multiple initiatives which focusses on reducing obesity, and associated NCDs.

1. **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS):** It is being implemented under the National Health Mission. It aims to screen and ensure early interventions to check the obesity-related risk factors from becoming complicated.
2. **Ayushman Bharat Health Wellness Centre scheme:** Preventive aspect of hypertension and NCDs is being strengthened under Comprehensive Primary Health Care by promotion of wellness activities and targeted communication at the community level.
3. **Eat Right Movement:** The Eat Right India movement is an initiative of the Government of India and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to transform the country's food system in order to ensure safe, healthy and sustainable food for all Indians.
4. **FSSAI limits for transfats:** FSSAI has issued guidelines limiting trans fatty acids in oils and fats to be not more than 2% by weight.
5. **FSS (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020:** It mandates that labels should mention food allergens, nutritional information including fat, trans fat, salt, sugar, added sugar etc.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Awareness about the grave dangers of obesity:** The medical community must create awareness about the NPCDCS guidelines, which recommend annual screening for excess weight in children as young as two to six years old.
2. **Improving the access to nutrient rich food:** The access of vulnerable sections to healthy nutrition must be enhanced by measures such as targeted cash transfers, vouchers for healthy foods, free healthy school meals, and primary care-based nutritional interventions.

3. **Initiatives to reduce obesity among adults:** Yoga days can be fixed in a week in offices, welfare societies. Also, under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, cleaning of parks and other spaces can be promoted, so that adults can come for exercise.
4. **Initiatives to reduce obesity among Children:** Strict implementation of RTE act norms, by implementing mandatory minimum grounds size and other sports infrastructure in schools. Construction of parks and open spaces in colonies, so that children can play outside rather than remaining busy with indoor activity like video games, computer games.
5. **Disincentivising the ultra-processed food industry:** Higher taxes on unhealthy processed and junk food, and front-of-pack nutrition labelling to guide consumers must be implemented.

Read More: Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Government interventions for Health

India-Poland Relations – Significance & Challenges – Explained Pointwise



Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk's recent visit to India has provided fresh momentum to India-Poland relations. The visit reflects the growing importance of India-Poland ties in strengthening India's engagement with Europe.

How has India-Poland relations evolved over the years?

Diplomatic Establishment	• India and Poland established diplomatic relations in **1954**, building on shared anti-colonial sympathies and support for peaceful coexistence.

Cold War Era	• Relations strengthened through economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and India's engagement with Poland under its socialist government. • Poland assisted India in developing heavy industries, mining infrastructure, and power production equipment.
Post-1991 Period	• Poland's transition to a market economy and India's economic liberalisation opened new opportunities for trade and investment. • Major Indian IT companies established regional hubs in Poland, positioning the country as a nearshoring gateway for Indian technology services into Europe.
Strategic Partnership	• Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Poland in August 2024, the two countries elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership, marking a significant milestone.

What is the significance of India-Poland Relations?

1. **Economic Cooperation**: Poland is India's largest trading and investment partner in Central and Eastern Europe. Bilateral trade reached approximately US$6.36 billion in 2025, creating opportunities for cooperation in pharmaceuticals, IT, engineering, machinery and clean energy.
2. **Gateway to Europe**: Poland's strategic location in Central Europe provides Indian businesses with access to European markets, supply chains and logistics networks, facilitating trade, investment and economic integration with the European Union.
3. **Defence Cooperation**: Poland's history with Soviet-era military hardware makes it a crucial partner for maintaining and upgrading India's legacy equipment. India and Poland are exploring opportunities for technology transfer, joint development and co-production of defence equipment. Poland can contribute its expertise in maintaining, upgrading and modernising military equipment, helping India diversify its defence partnerships.
4. **Technology and Innovation**: India and Poland can leverage their complementary strengths in India's IT sector and Poland's technology ecosystem to promote cooperation in artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, telecommunications, space technology and digital payments.
5. **Energy Security**: India-Poland cooperation can help diversify energy partnerships and strengthen energy security through collaboration in renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy-efficient technologies and clean-energy innovation. It can also support India's transition towards a more sustainable and resilient energy system.
6. **Geopolitical Cooperation**: India and Poland cooperate on global security, counterterrorism and multilateral reforms. Both countries support strengthening the United Nations and promoting a rules-based international order. Poland's support for India's greater role in global institutions, along with dialogue on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and West Asian security, provides opportunities to deepen their strategic partnership.
7. **People-to-People Ties**: The India-Poland bond is bolstered by historical memory, such as the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar sheltering 1,000 Polish children during World War II. Today, over 30,000 Indians

reside in Poland, alongside thousands of Indian university students, strengthening education, research, and cultural links.

What are the Challenges in the relation?

1. **Geopolitical Differences**: Poland strongly supports Ukraine in the Russia–Ukraine war, whereas India has maintained a balanced approach, emphasising dialogue, diplomacy and strategic autonomy while continuing its defence and energy ties with Russia. These differing positions may create diplomatic differences and affect mutual perceptions.
2. **Untapped Trade Potential**: Despite growing bilateral trade, significant opportunities remain unexplored. In 2025, India-Poland bilateral trade reached approximately $6.36 billion, but scope exists to expand cooperation in pharmaceuticals, textiles, chemicals, engineering goods, IT and renewable energy.
3. **Limited Defence Cooperation**: Despite a history of defence equipment purchases, India and Poland have not developed sustained defence-industrial collaboration. Differences in strategic priorities, India's historical dependence on Russian military equipment, and limited technology-sharing arrangements have constrained deeper engagement.
4. **Trade and Regulatory Barriers**: Differences in tariffs, product standards and regulatory requirements increase the cost of bilateral trade. For e.g. Indian textile exporters face EU customs duties of around 9.5–12%, while chemical exporters must comply with the EU's REACH regulations, increasing compliance costs and limiting market access
5. **Connectivity Constraints**: Limited direct air connections and long-distance transport routes increase travel time and logistics costs between India and Poland, affecting tourism, business exchanges and trade.
6. **Limited High-Level Engagement**: Despite traditionally friendly relations, India and Poland have experienced long gaps between top-level visits, limiting political momentum and strategic coordination. For e.g. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Poland in 2024 was the first by an Indian Prime Minister in 45 years,

What are the areas of Cooperation between India and Poland?

1. **Political Cooperation**: India and Poland strengthen bilateral ties through regular high-level visits, diplomatic consultations and parliamentary exchanges. In 2024, both the countries elevated the relations to a **Strategic Partnership** after 45 years. The two countries adopted a **2024-2028 Action Plan** to promote regular political dialogue, security cooperation and coordination in multilateral forums.
2. **Trade and Investment**: Poland is India's largest trading partner in Central and Eastern Europe. Bilateral trade reached approximately $6.36 billion in 2025, covering sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, machinery, chemicals and engineering goods. The two countries aim to deepen economic ties through the **India-Poland Strategic Partnership Action Plan (2024-2028)**, with opportunities in infrastructure, mining, green technology and food processing.
3. **Defence Cooperation**: India and Poland aim to strengthen defence ties through regular institutional dialogue, modernisation of military equipment and collaboration between their defence industries. The **2003 Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation** provides an existing framework for engagement, while the **2024-2028 Strategic Partnership Action Plan** seeks to expand industrial cooperation and address outstanding issues.
4. **Energy Cooperation**: India and Poland are exploring cooperation in renewable energy, green hydrogen, energy efficiency and clean coal technologies to promote energy security and sustainable development. Both countries also see opportunities for collaboration in green hydrogen production, renewable energy technologies and industrial decarbonisation under their **Strategic Partnership Action Plan (2024-2028)**.

5. **Connectivity**: Under the **2024-2028 Strategic Partnership Action Plan**, both countries agreed to explore expanding direct flight connections and cooperation in transport infrastructure. Both the countries also highlighted cooperation in shipping, maritime security, port connectivity and the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** to improve supply-chain resilience and reduce transit times.
6. **Mining and Critical Minerals**: India and Poland are exploring cooperation in advanced mining technologies, high-tech machinery, mine safety and sustainable mineral extraction. Poland's expertise in intelligent mining and clean coal technologies can support India's mining modernisation. For e.g the 2024-2028 Strategic Partnership Action Plan prioritises collaboration in mining-related industries.
7. **People-to-People and Cultural Ties**: The **Jamsaheb Memorial Youth Exchange Programme**, launched in 2024, brings Polish youth to India to explore its history and culture. Cooperation in higher education, Sanskrit and Indology studies, language learning and cultural festivals further strengthens bilateral ties.

What were the key outcomes of the Polish Prime Minister's recent visit to India?

1. **Trade and Investment**: Both countries set a target to double bilateral trade by 2030, encouraging greater investment and business partnerships.
2. **Defence Cooperation**: Agreed to establish a **Defence Industry Dialogue** to explore technology transfer, joint development and co-production of defence equipment.
3. **Disaster Resilience**: Poland announced its decision to join India's **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**.
4. **Critical Minerals and Mining**: Agreed to explore cooperation in mining, rare earth minerals, battery recycling and related industrial technologies.
5. **Connectivity:** Agreed to explore improved direct air connectivity and cooperation in shipping, maritime security and the **India-Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**.
6. **Support for India's Global Role**: Poland reiterated support for India's permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council and its candidature for a non-permanent seat for 2028-29.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Strengthen High-Level Engagement**: India and Poland should institutionalise regular high-level visits, foreign ministerial consultations and strategic dialogues. Regular engagement can help resolve bilateral concerns, accelerate implementation of the 2024-2028 Action Plan and strengthen cooperation in trade, defence and technology.
2. **Expand Trade and Investment**: India and Poland should diversify bilateral trade and encourage greater investment in manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, engineering, agriculture and emerging technologies. Both countries can strengthen business-to-business partnerships, support MSMEs and startups, and simplify regulatory procedures to reduce trade barriers.
3. **Leverage India-EU Relations**: India should utilise Poland's position as a member of the European Union to strengthen India-EU trade and investment negotiations, expand technology cooperation through the **India-EU Trade and Technology Council**, and improve connectivity under the **India-EU Connectivity Partnership**.
4. **Promote Technology Partnerships**: India and Poland should expand collaboration in artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, cybersecurity, telecommunications and space technology. Joint research, startup partnerships, technology transfer and industry–university linkages can foster innovation and strengthen digital resilience.
5. **Improve Connectivity**: India and Poland should strengthen direct air links, maritime cooperation and logistics networks to facilitate trade, tourism and business exchanges.
6. **Address Geopolitical Differences**: India and Poland should maintain open diplomatic dialogue on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and European security, recognising their differing strategic priorities. India

can emphasise dialogue, diplomacy and peaceful resolution while acknowledging Poland's security concerns.

Conclusion: India and Poland should transform their Strategic Partnership into a results-oriented relationship through sustained political engagement, deeper economic ties and cooperation in emerging technologies.

UPSC GS-2: International Relations
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El Nino: Concept & Impacts – Explained Pointwise



According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the 2026 El Niño could be unprecedented in intensity, potentially making it one of the strongest events since records began in 1950. As El Niño conditions are expected to peak towards the end of the year, the WMO has warned that their effects could persist into 2027.

El Niño is a climate pattern that emerges sporadically along the equatorial Pacific and is known for triggering global weather changes. The impacts of El Niño extend far beyond weather, influencing marine ecosystems, agriculture, economy, and human health. As this powerful force returns, understanding the concept of El Niño and its widespread impacts becomes crucial for everyone.

What Is El Nino?

- **El Niño** (Spanish for "The Boy Child," referring to the Christ Child because the phenomenon often peaks around December) is a climate pattern characterized by the **unusual warming of surface waters** in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.
- El Niño is the "warm phase" of a larger phenomenon called the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO).

- La Niña, the "cool phase" of ENSO, is a pattern that describes the unusual cooling of the region's surface waters.
- El Niño and La Niña are considered the ocean part of ENSO, while the Southern Oscillation is its atmospheric changes. El Niño events occur irregularly at 2- to 7-year intervals.
- Scientists calculate the **Relative Oceanic Niño Index (RONI)** using sea surface temperature data from the equatorial Pacific Ocean (Niño 3.4 region):
    - If the three-month average RONI exceeds +0.5°C, an **El Niño** event is declared.
    - If the three-month average RONI falls below −0.5°C, a **La Niña** event is declared.

How will the formation of El Nino occur?

The formation of El Niño involves a series of interactions between the ocean and the atmosphere in the tropical Pacific. Here are the key steps in this complex process:

- **Normal conditions:** Under normal conditions, the trade winds (which are part of the Earth's general circulation) blow across the tropical Pacific from east to west. These winds push warm surface water towards the western Pacific (near Asia and Australasia), piling it up there. This leaves room for cold, nutrient-rich water to well up from the depths in the eastern Pacific (near South America).
- **Air circulation:** The accumulation of warm water in the west heats the overlying air, making it moist and buoyant. This warm, moist air rises, leading to the formation of rain clouds. The rising air creates a low-pressure system in the west, and a high-pressure system forms in the east where cooler, drier air descends. This pressure difference reinforces the trade winds, completing what is known as the Walker circulation.
- **Weakening trade winds:** The onset of El Niño involves a weakening or reversal of the trade winds. This can happen for various reasons, such as changes in the sea surface temperature distribution or atmospheric pressure patterns. The weakening of the trade winds is often initiated by an atmospheric phenomenon known as a westerly wind burst.

- **Spread of warm water:** When the trade winds weaken, they can no longer push the warm water to the west as effectively. As a result, the warm water spreads from the western Pacific to the east. This process is known as a **Kelvin wave**. The spread of warm water to the east suppresses the upwelling of cold water near South America.
- **Feedback loop:** The eastward spread of warm water further weakens the trade winds, creating a feedback loop that intensifies El Niño. This is because the warmer water warms the overlying air, which lowers the atmospheric pressure and weakens the trade winds.
- **Establishment of El Niño:** As this feedback loop continues, the warm water in the eastern Pacific gets warmer, and the weakened trade winds get weaker. Eventually, a full-blown El Niño event is established, characterized by significantly warmer than average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific.

What is different about 2026 El Niño?

1. **Exceptional intensity**: Sea surface temperatures in the Niño 3.4 region are forecast to reach around +3.8°C above average during October-December 2026, potentially exceeding the previous record of +2.3°C during 2014-15.
2. **Rapid strengthening:** The event has intensified rapidly across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific, with unusually high ocean temperatures and significant changes in atmospheric circulation.

3. **Potentially historic event**: NOAA's October outlook indicates a substantial possibility of an event stronger than previous El Niño episodes dating back to 1950, based on RONI.
4. **Longer persistence**: The event is expected to remain strong through the end of 2026 and may persist into early 2027.
5. **Greater risk of climate extremes**: It may increase the likelihood of heatwaves, droughts and floods in different parts of the world by disrupting normal rainfall and temperature patterns.

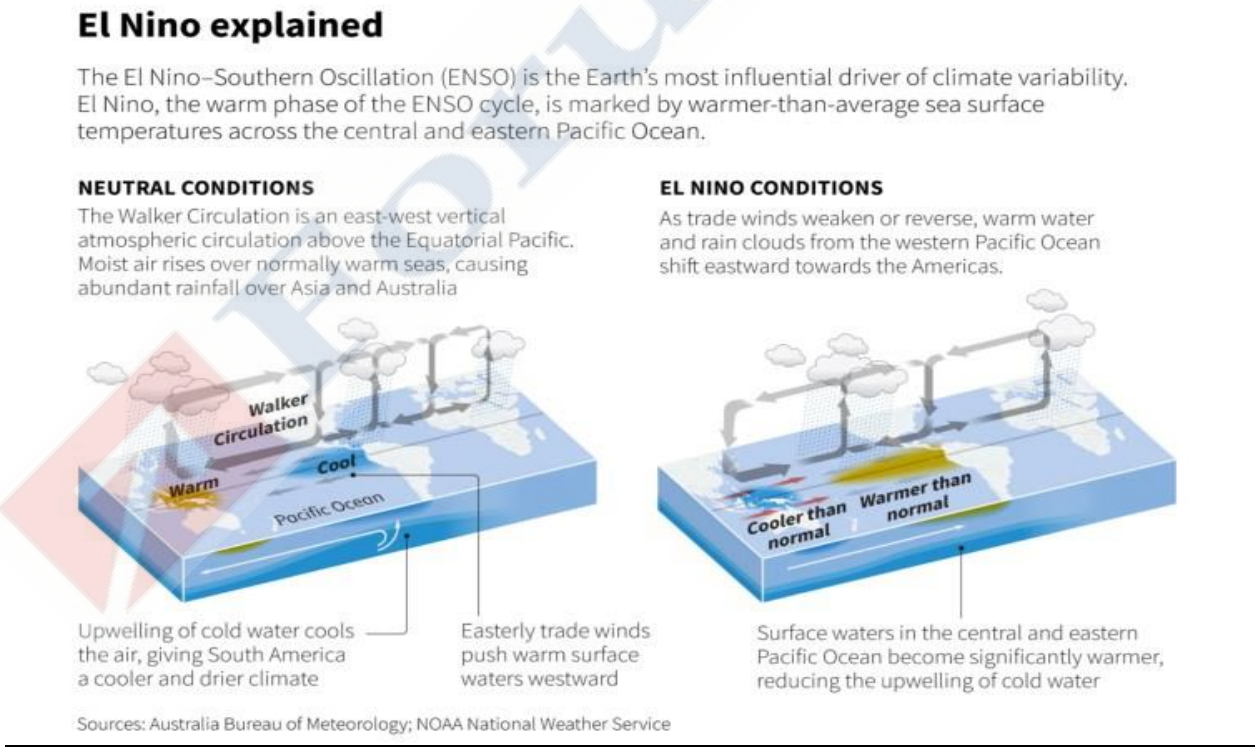
Due to its exceptional intensity and potential to cause widespread climate disruptions, the 2026 El Niño has been termed a **"Godzilla El Niño."**

What are the impacts of El Niño on India?

Impact on Monsoon & Rainfall	• **Suppressing the Monsoon**: El Niño can significantly impact the Indian monsoon, leading to fluctuations in rainfall patterns. During an El Niño year, India often experiences below-average monsoon rains, potentially causing drought conditions. El Niño leads to: ○ **Delayed Onset:** The monsoon often arrives late along the Kerala coast. ○ **Prolonged Dry Spells:** Extended periods of little to no rain ("monsoon breaks") during July and August, which are critical months for crop sowing. ○ **Deficient Overall Rainfall:** Historically, about half of all El Niño years have resulted in distinct monsoon droughts in India.
Agriculture & Food Security	Because a vast portion of Indian agriculture relies entirely on rainfed farming, the weakening of the monsoon triggers a chain reaction through the economy: • **Reduced Crop Yields**: El Niño-induced rainfall deficits directly hurt *kharif* (summer) crops such as rice, pulses, soybeans, and cotton. Lower production leads to reduced income for farmers. • **Rabi Crop Dependence**: Poor reservoir levels from a weak monsoon can also affect *rabi* (winter) crops like wheat and mustard, which depend on irrigation from stored water. • **Livestock and Dairy**: Drought conditions reduce fodder availability, impacting livestock health and dairy productivity, a key rural income source.
Ecological & Wildlife Impact	• **Forest Fires:** Extended droughts and soaring temperatures dry out forest floors, drastically increasing the frequency, intensity, and spread of forest fires—particularly in the deciduous forests of Central India and parts of the Western Ghats. • **Fodder and Water Crises in Protected Areas:** Searing heat and dried-up natural waterholes (water bodies) inside national parks and wildlife sanctuaries force megafauna like Asian elephants and Indian rhinoceroses to migrate out of protected boundaries, leading to a sharp rise in **human-wildlife conflict.**

Economic Impact	• **Rural Economic Slowdown:** Reduced agricultural output directly lowers incomes for millions of farmers, suppressing rural consumer demand for goods and services across the country. A hotter India is not merely a warmer India; it is an India where earning a livelihood becomes increasingly difficult. • **Rising Food Prices**: Lower production of vegetables, cereals, and pulses drives up market prices. This forces households to spend a larger share of income on food, reducing discretionary spending. For policymakers, this creates a difficult balancing act – the same climate shock can simultaneously weaken growth & intensify inflationary pressures. • **Subsidy Burden**: The government often raises minimum support prices (MSPs) for crops to cushion farmer losses. Subsidized food distribution (e.g., PDS) also expands to cover drought-hit populations. • **Relief and Bailouts**: State and central governments spend heavily on drought relief measures, including loan waivers for farmers, free grain, and employment under rural job guarantee schemes (e.g., MGNREGA). • **Lower Tax Revenue**: Reduced agricultural output slows the rural economy, curbing demand for consumer goods, tractors, and fertilizers — lowering GST collections. • **Weakened Rural Consumption**: Farmers with lower incomes postpone buying vehicles, electronics, building materials, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), affecting manufacturing and retail sectors.

What are the El Nino impacts in regions outside India?



Source: NOAA

El Niño affects various regions across the globe in different ways. Here are some impacts observed in regions outside India:

- **North America:** El Niño tends to suppress Atlantic hurricane activity, although there are exceptions depending on other climate factors.
- **South America:** Coastal countries in South America like Peru and Ecuador can experience heavy rains and flooding. El Niño weakens the upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich waters along the coasts of South America, which can negatively impact marine ecosystems and fisheries.
- **Australia and Southeast Asia:** These regions generally experience decreased rainfall during El Niño events, which can lead to droughts and significantly impact agriculture, water supply, and ecosystems. This decrease in precipitation can also heighten the risk of wildfires.
- **Africa:** East Africa may receive more rain than usual, which could lead to flooding. Southern Africa may face drier conditions, which can lead to water shortages and impacts on agriculture.
- **Europe:** The impacts on Europe are more uncertain and depend on how El Niño interacts with other climate patterns. However, it can potentially influence the strength and path of the jet stream, which could result in various weather anomalies in the region.

How are countries around the world planning to mitigate and combat the impacts of El Niño?

- **Creation of disaster risk reduction funds:** Countries like Peru have created dedicated funds to tackle El Niño. Peru's Disaster Risk Reduction Fund is specifically designated to prepare for and mitigate the potential impacts of El Niño. These funds are often allocated to various activities, including improving infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events, supporting early warning systems, and assisting recovery efforts after disasters.
- **Improved monitoring and early warning systems:** The US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) continually invests in technology to monitor oceanic and atmospheric conditions better, helping predict an impending El Niño event. Early warnings from organizations like NOAA can help governments worldwide to prepare well in advance and implement strategies to minimize potential impacts.
- **International cooperation and policy frameworks:** Many countries collaborate through international agreements and conventions to manage El Niño's impacts. The Paris Climate Agreement, signed by 196 nations, underscores the importance of global action to address climate change, including phenomena like El Niño. These agreements may involve the sharing of information and resources, the development of common strategies, and cooperation on research and development efforts related to El Niño.
- **Climate change mitigation efforts:** As the effects of climate change can potentially exacerbate the frequency and intensity of El Niño, efforts to mitigate climate change are an integral part of addressing El Niño. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) plays a crucial role in guiding global policies related to climate change, including strategies to cope with El Niño events.
- **Adapting agriculture and infrastructure:** In countries like India, which are heavily impacted by El Niño, there are ongoing efforts to adapt agricultural practices to be more resilient to changes in rainfall and temperature. This includes implementing irrigation facilities, diversifying crop types, and promoting weather-based crop insurance.
- **Impact-Based Analysis**: Organizations like the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) combine seasonal climate forecasts with data on crop yields, food security, and market prices. This allows them to predict exactly where and when crop failures or water shortages will occur.
- **Regional Collaboration**: Central American countries are coordinating through the Central American Agricultural Council to share strategies for the Dry Corridor, a region highly susceptible to drought.

What should be done?

1. **Promoting climate resilient infrastructure:** Infrastructure development needs to factor in climate resilience, meaning that buildings, roads, and other infrastructure should be constructed to withstand extreme weather events like those brought on by El Niño.
2. **Strengthening international collaboration**: Countries should strengthen international cooperation to share knowledge, technology, and resources to mitigate the impacts of El Niño. Climate change has no borders, and global collaboration is crucial.
3. **Climate change mitigation:** Efforts should be heightened to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as global warming can exacerbate the effects of El Niño. This includes promoting clean energy, reducing deforestation, and implementing sustainable practices in industries.
4. **Adapting agricultural practices:** In agriculture-based economies, there should be widespread education on the effects of El Niño on weather patterns to help farmers adapt their practices. This can include crop diversification, implementing irrigation facilities, and promoting weather-based crop insurance.
5. **Mandatory Rainwater Harvesting:** Accelerating desiltation (clearing out mud and silt) of traditional village tanks, stepwells, and farm ponds *before* the monsoon starts so they can catch and store every drop of rain that does fall.
6. **Strategic Food Grain Reservoirs:** Maintaining robust buffer stocks of staples (wheat, rice, pulses) via the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to stabilize market supply and clamp down on hoarding or food inflation during a deficit year.
7. **Broadening Crop Insurance:** Ensuring swift, hassle-free payouts through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) by leveraging satellite imaging and drones to assess crop damage quickly, keeping farmers out of debt traps.
8. **Building disaster management capacity:** Countries should work on building their capacity to manage and respond to disasters caused by El Niño. This includes establishing effective disaster response strategies, conducting regular drills, and ensuring adequate resources are allocated to disaster management.
9. **Conserving marine ecosystems:** Since El Niño severely impacts marine ecosystems, it is crucial to conserve and protect these ecosystems as much as possible. This includes preventing overfishing, reducing pollution, and protecting marine habitats like coral reefs.

Conclusion: El Niño is not merely a weather event but a development challenge. India needs stronger climate adaptation measures through heat-resilient cities, worker protection & better water management. Climate risk is now economic risk, and its burden falls most heavily on the poor.

Syllabus: GS 1: Geophysical Phenomena: Important Geophysical phenomena
Sources: Business Standard, Bloomberg, Time, The Weather Channel, Climate.gov, Live Mint, NPR, TOI, Reuters, India Today, DTE, Financial Express and BBC, Indian Express

Tropical Cyclone – Definition, Characteristics & Disaster Management in India – Explained Pointwise

Cyclone Arnab has rapidly advanced towards the Andhra Pradesh coast in recent hours and is expected to make landfall on Wednesday. Named by Bangladesh under the regional cyclone-naming system, it has been classified as a 'Very Severe Cyclonic Storm'.

Tropical cyclones are a major geographical hazard for India, with nearly 8% of the country's geographical area across 13 coastal States and Union Territories being vulnerable to severe cyclones. This underscores the importance of effective disaster preparedness, mitigation and risk-reduction measures.

What is a Tropical Cyclone? What are its Key Characteristics?

- A tropical cyclone is a rapidly rotating storm system that forms over warm ocean waters, featuring a low-pressure center, strong winds, and heavy thunderstorm bands.
- They are termed tropical cyclones because they develop predominantly over warm tropical oceans.

Key Characteristics:

1. **Low-pressure centre:** Air moves towards the low-pressure centre and rises, creating clouds and rainfall.
2. **Anatomy of Tropical Cyclone**: Tropical cyclone consists of:
    a. **The Eye:** The calm, roughly circular area at the center of the storm (typically 20 to 65 km in diameter). It features light winds, clear skies, and extremely low surface atmospheric pressure.
    b. **The Eyewall:** A ring of towering cumulonimbus clouds surrounding the eye. This is where the storm's most severe weather, strongest winds, and heaviest precipitation occur.
    c. **Rainbands:** Curved bands of clouds and thunderstorms that spiral outward from the eyewall, producing heavy bursts of rain and wind.
3. **Storm Surge**: Strong winds and low atmospheric pressure raise sea levels near the coast, potentially causing severe coastal flooding.
4. **No Fronts**: Unlike temperate cyclones, tropical cyclones generally do not have warm and cold fronts.
5. **Energy Source:** They derive energy mainly from warm ocean water and the release of latent heat during condensation.

Prerequisites for Formation of Tropical Cyclone:

1. **Warm Ocean Water:** Surface sea temperatures of at least **26.5°C (80°F)** extending down to a depth of around 50 meters.
2. **Atmospheric Instability:** Warm, moist air rising rapidly from the sea surface.
3. **Coriolis Effect:** Sufficient Earth rotation forces (typically occurring at least 5° of latitude away from the equator) to induce the storm's spin.
4. **Low Vertical Wind Shear:** Minimal change in wind speed or direction with altitude, allowing the vertical storm structure to remain intact.
5. **High Humidity**: Abundant moisture in the lower and middle troposphere promotes cloud formation and releases latent heat through condensation.
6. **Pre-existing Low-Pressure Disturbance:** An initial low-pressure system or atmospheric disturbance provides the starting point for the development of a cyclone.

Tropical Cyclone-Affected Regions:

Regional Terminology:

Tropical cyclones are known by different names in different ocean basins:

- **Hurricanes**: Used for tropical cyclones in North Atlantic Ocean & Northeastern Pacific Ocean.
- **Typhoons**: Used for tropical cyclones in Northwestern Pacific Ocean.
- **Cyclones**: Used for tropical cyclones in Indian Ocean.
- **Willy-willies**: A traditional term associated with tropical cyclones in Australia.
- **Bagyo**: The local term for tropical cyclones in the Philippines.
- **Taino**: A historical Caribbean term associated with hurricanes.

Tropical Cyclones in India:

India's North Indian Ocean (NIO) region, which encompasses the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, witnesses high frequency of cyclones. This poses significant threat to the Indian 7,500 km coastline, along with Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

- **Cyclones from the Bay of Bengal:** The Bay of Bengal has experienced an 8% decrease in cyclonic storms in the recent period (2001-2019), compared to the previous period (1982-2000). However, it still dominates in terms of cyclone frequency and intensity compared to the Arabian Sea. These cyclones often originate on the eastern side of the North Indian Ocean (NIO) Basin and initially move in a west-northwesterly direction.
- **Cyclones from the Arabian Sea:** Cyclones in the Arabian Sea are less frequent but no less dangerous. However, there has been a 52% increase in the number of cyclonic storms over the Arabian Sea (2001-2019), compared to the previous period (1982-2000).

What are the cyclone-prone regions of India?
What are the socio-economic impacts of cyclones in India?

Cyclones in India wreak significant havoc, leading to catastrophic socio-economic impacts. These impacts are not only direct, such as property damage and loss of life, but also indirect, affecting long-term economic development and societal well-being.

1. **Loss of life and displacement:** Historically, cyclones in India have resulted in substantial loss of life. Cyclones also often lead to mass displacement, as people are forced to evacuate their homes due to the imminent danger, leading to social disruption. **For e.g.** the 1999 Odisha cyclone claimed over 10,000 lives. The cyclone also resulted in mass displacement of people.
2. **Damage to infrastructure:** Cyclones cause significant infrastructure damage. This impacts transportation, communication, electricity, and water supply. **For e.g.** Cyclone Tauktae in 2021 caused widespread damage to roads, bridges and buildings in Gujarat and Maharashtra.
3. **High economic losses:** The economic impact extends to sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, affecting the country's GDP. **For e.g.** Cyclone Fani, which hit Odisha in 2019, resulted in losses estimated at $1.81 billion.
4. **Impacts on livelihoods:** Cyclones also negatively impact livelihoods, particularly for fishermen and farmers. **For e.g.** Cyclone Amphan (2020) in West Bengal disrupted the livelihoods of millions, causing an estimated $13 billion in damage.
5. **Effects on public health:** Post-cyclone conditions can lead to the spread of waterborne diseases, creating a public health crisis. **For e.g.** Outbreak of Cholera after Amphan.

6. **Impact on education:** Cyclones often result in the closure of schools, causing educational disruption. The schools are often used as shelter homes during the cyclones.
7. **Long-term economic development:** The high cost of post-disaster recovery diverts resources from other areas of economic development. This slows down the overall economic progress of the region.

What are the Cyclone disaster management mitigation and preparedness measures in India?

1. **Early warning systems:** India Meteorological Department (IMD) early warning system help in the early detection of cyclones. This helps in issuing timely warnings that help evacuate people and limit damage.
2. **National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP):** NCRMP, supported by the World Bank, aims to enhance the preparedness and resilience of coastal communities. This is achieved through the construction of cyclone shelters, infrastructure development, and improved access routes for effective evacuation.
3. **Cyclone Shelters**: Construction of multipurpose cyclone shelters in vulnerable coastal areas to protect people during severe cyclones.
4. **Coastal Protection Initiatives:** Natural barriers have been created like mangrove plantations and artificial barriers like sea walls and embankments to reduce the impact of cyclones.
5. **Infrastructure Retrofitting:** Indian government has initiated a retrofitting program to strengthen cyclone shelters in vulnerable areas.
6. **Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Project:** This initiative is designed to enhance the resilience of coastal areas through sustainable environmental practices. The project includes mapping vulnerable zones, promoting conservation, and implementing sustainable livelihood strategies for local communities.
7. **Colour-coding of cyclones By IMD:** The well-known colour-coding of natural disasters seeks to alert people to the risks' potential severity in advance. Green, yellow, orange, and red are the colours that IMD uses.
8. **Community-based disaster management:** These programs are implemented to raise awareness and train communities for cyclone preparedness. **For e.g.** In Odisha, locals have been trained to effectively respond during cyclones.
9. **Use of technology:** Technology, such as Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, have been used to help identify vulnerable zones and plan evacuation routes. This technology was notably used during Cyclone Fani in 2019.
10. **Coordinated efforts:** Effective disaster management requires coordinated efforts among various agencies, such as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs), IMD and local administrations.
11. **Evacuation planning:** Comprehensive evacuation plans are developed for vulnerable regions. **For e.g.** During Cyclone Amphan in 2020, these plans facilitated the evacuation of over two million people in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Read More- El Nino: Concept and impacts

What are the issues with Cyclone disaster management In India?

India has made considerable progress in managing cyclone disasters, especially in terms of evacuation and early warning systems. However, several challenges persist that need to be addressed for a more effective cyclone disaster management system.

1. **Gaps in Early-Warning Dissemination**: Warnings may not reach remote fishing communities and vulnerable populations in time.
2. **Ignorance of cyclone warnings:** One-third of the population of India which lives in the coastal area is poor and marginalized, rendering it ill-prepared and unable to cope with a disaster. On a few occasions, the warnings were not taken seriously by the local communities, thereby making it more disastrous. **For e.g.** During Ockhi cyclone disaster warnings were ignored by local bodies.
3. **Incapacity of State disaster management forces:** State disaster response forces lack the capacity and preparedness to effectively respond to disasters. As they are ill-prepared to respond, the onus of response always falls on the NDRF rendering golden hour response unavailable.
4. **Inadequate infrastructure:** Many coastal areas lack sufficient cyclone shelters, evacuation routes and cyclone-resistant housing. Critical infrastructure, including power lines, roads and communication networks, remains vulnerable to high winds and storm surges.
5. **Communication barriers:** Language barriers, illiteracy, and the lack of access to communication tools in rural and marginalized communities hinders the effective dissemination of early warnings and instructions.
6. **Limited Protection of Livelihoods**: Fishing communities, farmers and informal workers face significant income losses. Preparedness plans may not adequately address crop damage, livestock protection, fishing restrictions and livelihood restoration.
7. **Insufficient post-disaster response:** There is a noticeable lack of attention given to post-disaster response in India. **For e.g.** During Cyclone Jawad, many farmers resorted to distress selling and premature harvesting.

What should be done to ensure proper cyclone disaster management in India?

To ensure effective cyclone disaster management in India, several measures and actions can be taken. Here are some key steps that can be implemented:

1. **Strengthen early warning systems:** Strengthen early warning systems by investing in advanced technologies, such as weather radar systems and satellite imagery, to improve cyclone tracking and prediction.
2. **Improve communication and dissemination:** Multiple mediums, including mobile networks, radio, television, and social media, should be used to ensure widespread dissemination. **For e.g.** Odisha Disaster Management.
3. **Enhance preparedness and response planning:** Regular drills and exercises must be conducted to test the effectiveness of response mechanisms. Coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and the public must be improved.
4. **Strengthen infrastructure and resilience:** Investment in the construction and retrofitting of cyclone-resistant infrastructure, including cyclone shelters, coastal embankments, and resilient housing must be increased.
5. **Community engagement and capacity building:** Regular training programs and workshops to build the capacity of communities, local leaders, and volunteers in disaster management techniques must be conducted.
6. **Integration of technology:** Technological advancements, such as remote sensing, geospatial mapping, and early warning systems must be leveraged, to enhance cyclone monitoring, forecasting, and response.
7. **Improve Post-Disaster Monitoring**: Conduct damage assessments, audit relief distribution and evaluate disaster-response performance to identify gaps and improve preparedness.

Conclusion: India should move towards a proactive, technology-driven and community-centred approach that integrates early warning, resilient infrastructure, and effective local governance to minimise cyclone-related losses.

Read More: Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus:
GS-1: Geography
GS-3: Disaster Management: Disaster and disaster management.

Inter-State Council – Significance & Limitations – Explained Pointwise

The Inter-State Council (ISC), conceived as a vital institutional mechanism to promote cooperative federalism in India, has largely remained dormant. The lack of regular meetings, operational autonomy and independent authority has limited its effectiveness, creating a significant institutional gap in India's federal framework.

What is the Inter-State Council? Explain its Composition & Functions?

- The **Inter-State Council** is a constitutional, non-permanent advisory body established under **Article 263** of the Constitution of India. It serves as a institutional platform for promoting **cooperative federalism**, enabling coordination and dialogue between the Union Government and the States.
- ISC is a vital forum in India's political structure, established to facilitate discussions and cooperation between the Central government and the State governments.
- It serves as a key mechanism to promote and support the principle of cooperative federalism in the country.
- The Council may meet **at least thrice in a year**.

Background:

- The provision for an ISC is enshrined in **Article 263** of the Constitution, which empowers the **President** to establish such a council if it is in the public interest.
- Despite this provision existing since 1950, the Council was not formed for four decades. It was finally established in **1990** by the **Janata Dal government** led by V. P. Singh through a presidential order, following the key recommendations of the **Sarkaria Commission (1988)**.

Composition:

- **Chairman:** The Prime Minister
- **Members:**
  - **Chief Ministers** of all States and Union Territories that have a legislative assembly.
  - **Administrators** of Union Territories without a legislative assembly
  - **6 Ministers** of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers to be nominated by the Prime Minister.
- **Permanent Invitees:** 13 Union Ministers are permanent invitees to the Council.

Functions & Duties of ISC:

1. **Coordination:** The ISC aims to foster coordination between the States and the Central government in matters of policy making and implementation.
2. **Investigation & Discussion:** Investigating and discussing subjects in which two or more States, or the Union and one or more States, have a shared or common interest (such as internal security, trade, disaster management, or socio-economic policies).
3. **Inquire and Advise:** Inquiring into and advising upon non-legal disputes or grievances that arise between different States.
4. **Resolve Disputes:** The council also assists in resolving disputes between states or between states and the central government.
5. **Make Policy Recommendations:** Making recommendations on any such subjects to bring about better coordination of policy, administrative actions, and legislative strategies across state borders.

Standing Committee of ISC:

- To ensure continuous dialogue, the Council also has a Standing Committee. It was established in **1996**.
- The Standing Committee has been reconstituted from time to time with the approval of the Chairman of the Council. It was last reconstituted in November 2024.
- **Composition of Standing Committee:**
    - **Union Home Minister** as the Chairman
    - **5 Union Cabinet Ministers**
    - **9 Chief Ministers**
- Its role is to facilitate continuous consultation and process issues related to centre-state relations before they are taken up by the full council.
- The standing committee also monitors the implementation of the decisions taken on the recommendations of the Council and considers any other matter referred to it by the Chairman or the Council.
- The Council is assisted by a secretariat called the **Inter-State Council Secretariat**. This secretariat was set-up in 1991 and is headed by a secretary to the Government of India. Since 2011, it is also functioning as the secretariat of the Zonal Councils.

What are the other bodies that promote inter-State relations in India?

Zonal Councils	• Zonal Councils are **Statutory Bodies**. They were established under Part III of the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**. • Zonal Councils are the regional counterparts to the national-level ISC. They were created to address issues specific to different regions of the country. • There are **5 Zonal Councils**, each covering a specific geographical region of India – North, South, East, West & Central Zonal Councils. • **Composition:** 1. **Common Chairman**: The **Union Home Minister** chairs all five Zonal Councils. 2. **Vice-Chairman**: The **Chief Ministers** of the States in the zone act as Vice-Chairman by rotation, usually for one year. 3. **Members**: Chief Minister and two other ministers from each State in the zone, plus administrators of UTs. 4. **Advisors**: One person nominated by the NITI Aayog and the Chief Secretaries of each State (they participate but cannot vote). • **Main objectives**

	1. **Emotional Integration**: To stop the growth of acute "state-consciousness," regionalism, and linguism. 2. **Boundary & Border Disputes**: Solving local issues like small border adjustments or forest land disputes between neighbors. 3. **Infrastructure Coordination**: Planning regional transport, power grids, and water sharing. 4. **Security**: Coordinating anti-Naxal operations or coastal security (depending on the zone).

North East Zonal Council	• The North Eastern Council was created later, under the **North Eastern Council Act** of **1972**, to address the unique challenges and development needs of the northeastern region.
	• **Composition:**
	  ○ **Chairman**: The Union Home Minister serves as the ex-officio Chairman.
	  ○ **Vice-Chairman**: The Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) is the ex-officio Vice-Chairman.
	  ○ **Members**: The Council comprises the Governors and Chief Ministers of all the eight Northeastern States.
	• Unlike the advisory role of the Zonal Councils, the NEC is a statutory body for regional planning and development.
	• It focuses on:
	  ○ Formulating unified and coordinated regional plans for the Northeast.
	  ○ Addressing the specific economic and social development needs of the region.

GST Council	• A constitutional body under **Article 279A** that brings together the Centre and States to make recommendations on GST rates, exemptions and other GST-related matters.
NITI Aayog Governing Council	• Comprising the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and relevant Union Territory representatives, it provides a platform to discuss national development priorities and promote cooperative federalism.

What is the significance of the Inter-State Council (ISC) in promoting cooperative federalism in India?

1. **Promoting Cooperative Federalism**: The ISC is the ultimate platform for Cooperative Federalism. It moves away from a "top-down" approach (where the Center dictates) to a "horizontal" approach (where the Center and States negotiate). It allows Chief Ministers to voice regional concerns directly to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

2. **Structured Dialogue**: It provides a permanent, institutionalized platform for the Centre and States to sit together, exchange views, and understand each other's perspectives on various issues, moving beyond informal or ad-hoc discussions.
3. **Building Consensus**: It helps build a national consensus on policies that affect both the Union and the States. By facilitating open dialogue, it aims to resolve differences through discussion rather than confrontation.
4. **Investigating Disputes**: Under Article 263, one of its core functions is to investigate and advise on disputes between States. This provides a platform for inter-State dispute resolution before they escalate into legal or political battles.
5. **Political Disputes**: While the judiciary handles legal disputes, the ISC addresses the political dimensions of Centre-State and Inter-State conflicts, offering recommendations to resolve them amicably.
6. **Platform for Regional Issues**: Chief Ministers can use this forum to raise issues specific to their regions, bringing them to the attention of the entire national leadership.
7. **Implementation of Recommendations**: It has been instrumental in examining and implementing the recommendations of key commissions on Centre-State relations, such as the Sarkaria Commission and the Punchhi Commission.
8. **Expert Consultation via the Standing Committee**: The Standing Committee of the ISC provides a continuous mechanism for consultation. It processes complex matters (like the Punchhi Commission reports on Center-State relations) before they reach the full Council. This ensures that when the full Council finally meets, the discussions are backed by rigorous data and prior departmental scrutiny.

What are the major limitations of the Inter-State Council (ISC)?

1. **Infrequent and Irregular Meetings**: The Sarkaria Commission, which recommended the Council's formation, suggested it should meet at least three times a year . However, since its establishment in 1990, the Council has met only 11 times, with the last meeting taking place in 2016. This long gap undermines the Council's purpose as a continuous forum for dialogue.
2. **Advisory and Non-Binding Nature**: The ISC's recommendations are purely advisory and not binding on the Central government. This lack of enforceability means that even if the Council deliberates and makes suggestions, the Centre is under no constitutional or legal obligation to implement them.
3. **Centre's Dominance in Agenda Setting**: The functioning of the ISC is heavily skewed in favor of the Central government. The Council meets only when the Prime Minister (the Chairperson) decides to convene it, not when the States demand a meeting. The agenda is also set by the Centre, which limits the scope of discussion and prevents states from bringing up issues that the Central government might find uncomfortable.
4. **Ineffectiveness in Resolving Core Disputes**: Despite being established to inquire into and advise upon disputes, the ISC has largely failed to resolve major inter-State conflicts. Long-standing issues like border disputes (e.g. between Karnataka-Maharashtra, Assam-Meghalaya) and river water disputes remain unresolved, often escalating into violence or ending up in the judiciary.
5. **Impact of Political Dynamics**: The effectiveness of the ISC is often paralyzed by the prevailing political atmosphere. When the party in power at the Centre is different from the parties ruling the States, discussions can become adversarial, with Chief ministers airing grievances rather than engaging in collaborative problem-solving.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Institutionalize Regular and Mandatory Meetings**: The Sarkaria Commission recommended the Council meet at least three times a year. Making this mandatory would transform the ISC from an occasional forum into a permanent platform for continuous dialogue and dispute resolution.

2. **Give the Council a Binding and Quasi-Judicial Role**: The Council's recommendations are purely advisory and non-binding, which often renders State participation futile. To address this, expand its role to function as a "collaborative council" with quasi-judicial powers to ensure its advice is heeded .
3. **State-Initiated Agenda**: The agenda is currently set by the Prime Minister, limiting the council's ability to address State-initiated concerns . A reformed ISC should allow States to put forth items for discussion, ensuring their most pressing issues are heard.
4. **Link with Zonal Councils**: The effectiveness of the ISC could be enhanced by better integrating it with the Zonal Councils, which have also become largely dormant. These Councils could act as filtering mechanisms, resolving issues at the regional level before they reach the ISC.
5. **Implement Pending Recommendations from Key Commissions:**
    a. **Punchhi Commission (2010):**
        - **Mandatory Consultation on Concurrent List**: The Union should consult the States through the ISC before introducing any bill in Parliament regarding subjects in the Concurrent List.
        - **Internal Security Role**: The Commission suggested that the ISC should be the primary forum for discussing internal security and communal harmony.
        - **Treaty-Making Powers**: It recommended that the Union consult the ISC when making international treaties that significantly impact the subjects in the State List.
        - **Functional Continuity**: It proposed that the Zonal Councils should meet at least twice a year and their secretariats should be merged with the ISC Secretariat to ensure better coordination between regional and national federal issues.
    b. **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC, 2002):**
        - **Regularity of Meetings**: It recommended a constitutional or statutory mandate that the ISC must meet at least thrice a year.
        - **Broadening the Agenda**: The NCRWC suggested that the ISC should not just discuss "disputes" but should proactively discuss socio-economic planning and development, moving beyond the narrow interpretation of Article 263.
        - **Permanent Secretariat**: It pushed for an independent and permanent Secretariat for the ISC, staffed by experts, to ensure that research and follow-up are continuous rather than "event-based."

Conclusion: The Inter-State Council is vital for strengthening cooperative federalism in India. Regular meetings, constructive dialogue and effective follow-up on its recommendations can enhance Centre-State coordination and promote harmonious inter-State relations.

UPSC GS-2: Polity
Read More: Indian Express

Digital Arrest Fraud – Meaning, Causes & Initiatives – Explained Pointwise

Describing digital arrest scams as one of the biggest financial frauds threatening the country's economy, the Supreme Court has proposed directions requiring banks to compensate victims and face prosecution if their failure to exercise due diligence is found to have facilitated such frauds.

Digital arrest fraud is a new form of cybercrime in India. As of January 2026, the Supreme Court of India has noted that victims (primarily the elderly) have lost over **₹3,000 crore** to this fraud. These cyber crimes have seriously grave concerns and, hence, these must be addressed at the earliest.

What is Digital Arrest? What is the modus operandi?

- Digital arrest is a **cyber fraud technique** in which criminals **psychologically trap a person online**, making them believe they are under arrest or investigation and coercing them into transferring money.
- Digital arrest involves cybercriminals posing as law enforcement agents (from the CBI, Narcotics Department, or Reserve Bank of India) who claim that the victim is involved in illegal activities like movement of drugs or a suspicious package. The victims are tricked into remaining under constant visual surveillance via Skype or other video conferencing platforms until the criminals' demands are met.
- The victim is **not physically detained**, but is **mentally confined through fear** — hence the term *digital arrest.*

Modus Operandi of Digital arrest:

Caller ID Spoofing	Scammers disguise their phone number to look like it is from a legitimate government office or police department. Scammers also reach out via video calls using WhatsApp or Skype.
Intimidation	Victims are falsely accused of crimes like drug trafficking or money laundering, and are shown fake documents and setups that mimic police stations. The scammers use fear tactics, such as threatening for jail-term or property seizure, to create urgency.
Isolation	Victims are instructed to remain on the call and not to contact anyone else. This creates a sense of urgency and fear. The fraudsters also use deepfake videos and fake arrest warrants to impersonate officials of law enforcement agencies.
Demands for Money and Personal Identity Theft	The fraudsters demand immediate payment, often via gift cards, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency, which would make the money transfer difficult to trace. Some scammers ask for Aadhaar Details, Bank account details, and other personal information, which are later used for identity theft.

xamples of Digital Arrest Fraud Cases:

Digital arrest fraud cases have not only targeted the vulnerable groups, but also wealthy individuals as well. Vast sums of Money have also been stolen from wealthy individuals.

Vardhman Group Director's case	Scammers duped the textile industry doyen S P Oswal into transferring Rs 7 crore to their bank accounts, by posing as CBI Officers and intimidating him on false money laundering cases.
Fake impersonation as CJI	There have been cases where a person impersonated the former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, faked hearing a matter on skype and thereafter passed an order.
NRI Doctor Couple Defrauded in Delhi	In a **sophisticated "digital arrest" scam**, an elderly **NRI doctor couple in South Delhi's Greater Kailash** was duped of **around ₹14.85 crore** by fraudsters. Scammers **posed as law enforcement and investigative officials**, claiming the couple was under investigation and threatening immediate legal action if they didn't cooperate. Over **more than 2 weeks**, the couple was kept under **continuous video calls**, intimidated and coerced into transferring huge sums of money to accounts controlled by the criminals.

Rise in Digital arrest cases:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in March 2024, issued a press release, alerting people against incidents of blackmail and digital arrest by cyber criminals impersonating Police authorities, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Narcotics Department, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Enforcement Directorate and other law enforcement agencies.
- According to data compiled by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and reports submitted before the Supreme Court:

Year	Reported Complaints	Financial losses
2022	39,925	Rs 91.14cr
2023	60,676	Rs 339cr
2024	1,23,672	Rs 1935 cr
2025	58,239	Rs 1211cr

Jan-Aug 2026	21,928	Rs 647cr

What are the reasons behind rise in the digital arrest cases in India?

1. **Rapid Digitalisation without Matching Awareness:** There has been an explosion of smartphones, online banking, UPI & digital payments in India. However, the legal awareness about arrest procedures has not growth at the same pace. Many citizens are not aware that arrests cannot happen online. This creates a trust gap which has been exploited by the scammers.
2. **Fear of Law Enforcement & Social Stigma:** Fraudsters exploit the fear of police, courts, ED, CBI & the shame linked to the allegations like money laundering or drugs. Victims comply silently instead of verifying with the authorities.
3. **Sophisticated Social Engineering:** Scammers use fake official uniforms, IDs, court orders & caller ID spoofing to confine the victim into a psychological trap. Thus, cybercriminals are using technological and psychological tactics to target citizens.
4. **Availability of Digital Tools to Criminals:** Criminals have easy access to devices & tools like SIM Box, encrypted communication apps, mule bank accounts – using which they are able to route calls & SMSes, bypassing international charges, making foreign calls appear local & funnel the stolen money through mule accounts within minutes, making it impossible for Police to freeze the funds in time.
5. **The "Shame" Factor:** Many victims, especially high-ranking professionals or the elderly, do not report the crime due to the embarrassment of being "duped," allowing scammers to operate without fear.
6. **Serious Allegations:** By accusing victims of "Money Laundering," "Narcotics Trafficking (MDMA)," or "Terror Financing," scammers trigger a "fight or flight" response. The fear of social stigma and a permanent criminal record makes people desperate to "settle" the matter.

What are the concerns with the rising Digital Arrest Fraud cases in India?

1. **Financial Losses:** The financial losses to the victims become impossible to recover because the scammers request payments through untraceable methods like cryptocurrency, gift cards, or wire transfers. The financial loss due to digital arrest have grown from **₹91 crore** in 2022 to **₹1,935 crore** in 2024.
2. **Negative emotional and Psychological Impact:** Victims feel intimidated and psychological pressure, which can lead to anxiety, stress. The scammers use threatening language and claim serious consequences like jail time, asset seizures, or even deportation.
3. **Data Leaks:** Large-scale data breaches (from insurance portals, travel sites, etc.) provide scammers with a "lead list" that includes the victim's name, Aadhaar number, and financial status, making the initial "official" call sound incredibly credible.
4. **Targeting the "Wealthy & Vulnerable" (Seniors):** Senior citizens and retired professionals often have significant life savings but may not be fully aware of the latest cyber-tactics.
5. **Organized Cross-Border Syndicates:** These are no longer individual hackers but **organized "Cyber-Slavery" hubs**, mostly operating out of Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar). Scammers are given scripts, trained in Indian accents/languages, and taught how to navigate Indian legal terminology (BNS/BNSS).
6. **Use of 'Deepfakes' & AI:**
    a. **Visual Authenticity:** Scammers now use AI to create high-quality deepfake videos of real IPS officers, CBI directors, or even sitting judges.

b. **Virtual Courtrooms:** Fraudsters set up elaborate "studio" backgrounds that mimic police stations or courtrooms. On a WhatsApp or Skype call, a victim sees what looks like a genuine judicial proceeding.
c. **Voice Cloning:** AI can now mimic the voice of a family member "calling from the police station," adding an emotional layer of panic that overrides logical thinking.

What has the Supreme Court observed and directed in various cases concerning digital arrest scams in India?

October 2025: Suo motu cognisance	• The Supreme Court initiated suo motu proceedings after a senior citizen couple complained of losing their life savings of approximately ₹1.05 crore to fraudsters impersonating CBI, ED and judicial officials. • The fraudsters used forged Supreme Court documents and threatened the couple with arrest and property seizure. • The Court recognised the **organised nature of these crimes** and the vulnerability of senior citizens.
December 2025: Coordinated investigation and preservation of evidence	• Directed intermediaries to preserve data relating to mobile phones allegedly used in cybercrimes. • Sought coordinated participation of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Telecommunications, MeitY and Ministry of Finance.
August 2026: Stronger financial safeguards and victim protection	• **RBI's responsibility**: Directed RBI to adopt and circulate an SOP for temporary debit holds on bank accounts and transactions linked to cyber fraud and mule-account activity. • **Grievance redressal**: Directed States and UTs to operationalise grievance redressal and money-restoration mechanisms. • **e-Zero FIR**: Asked States and UTs to adopt the e-Zero FIR mechanism in consultation with I4C. • **Victim compensation**: Asked the inter-departmental committee to examine a framework for shared liability and victim compensation. • **Faster recovery**: Directed adjudicating authorities, including courts, consumer forums and RBI Ombudsman, to ensure speedy disbursement of recovered money to victims. • **Public awareness**: Asked State Legal Services Authorities to develop awareness programmes and assistance mechanisms for victims.

October 2026: Accountability of banks and financial institutions	• **Seriousness of the menace:** Described digital arrest as the "biggest financial fraud" affecting the country's economy, involving thousands of crores of rupees. • **Bank accountability**: Proposed holding banks liable to compensate victims and face prosecution where failure of due diligence contributes to cyber fraud. • **Unusual transactions:** Emphasised that banks should temporarily suspend transactions inconsistent with customers' established transaction patterns. • **Use of AI**: Suggested that banks use artificial intelligence and transaction-history analysis to identify suspicious financial activities. • **Physical verification**: Suggested verification of unusually large transactions, particularly those involving vulnerable customers such as pensioners and senior citizens. • **RBI regulations:** Stressed that proposed RBI regulations must contain enforceable provisions for victim compensation and institutional accountability.

What have been the efforts of the government to control these frauds?

Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC)	Formed in **December 2025**, this high-powered panel is chaired by the Special Secretary (Internal Security) and includes members from **RBI, MeitY, DoT, and Ministry of Law**. Their mandate is to identify legal gaps and ensure "time-bound compliance" by social media platforms to block scammers.
Role of CBI	In 2025, the Supreme Court granted the **CBI a countrywide jurisdiction** to probe digital arrest cases. This allows the CBI to bypass the need for specific state permissions, enabling them to dismantle interstate and international syndicates more effectively.
Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)	The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), part of the cyber and information security division of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, is dedicated to address rising cybercrime.
Joint Cyber Coordination Teams (JCCTs)	Based at the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)**, these teams focus on "hotspots" like Mewat, Jamtara, and Ahmedabad. They coordinate raids across state lines to catch the "mule account" holders and technical operators.
International Spoofed Calls Prevention System	The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has deployed a system that identifies and blocks international calls that manipulate the "Calling Line Identity" (CLI) to appear as Indian phone numbers (+91).

Mass Blocking of Identifiers	By the end of 2025, the government had successfully blocked: • **7.8 lakh+ SIM cards** linked to fraud. • **2.9 lakh+ IMEI numbers** (mobile devices). • **83,000+ WhatsApp accounts** and **3,900+ Skype IDs** used for digital arrests.
Inter-ministerial committee against transnational crime	In May 2024, an inter-ministerial committee, comprising various law enforcement and intelligence agencies, was established to address the increase in transnational cybercrimes targeting Indians, especially from Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia.
1930 Helpline & NCRP	The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (**cybercrime.gov.in**) and the **1930** toll-free number allow for the immediate reporting of fraud.
CFCFRMS (Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting System)	This backend system links police with banks. If a victim reports a fraud within the "**Golden Hour**," the system can freeze the funds in the scammer's account before they are siphoned off.
Samanvaya & Pratibimb Platforms	These AI-driven tools provide real-time mapping of cyber-criminal locations and help law enforcement agencies track the movement of money across different states.
Uniform Inter-State Laws	Under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**, the government is working to ensure that "Digital Arrest" is explicitly defined as a distinct criminal act of extortion and impersonation, removing any legal ambiguity.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Instant Freezing without FIR:** Building on the Supreme Court's December 2025 directive, **I4C** and banks should be allowed to freeze suspicious accounts immediately upon a 1930 report, even before a formal FIR is filed. The first 60-120 minutes (called the **'Golden Hour'**) after a fraud occurs are critical for fund recovery.
2. **AI-Driven Transaction Monitoring:** Mandating banks to deploy AI/ML models that flag "unusual velocity" (e.g. a senior citizen suddenly transferring a large sum to a new account). This "speed-breaker" approach can halt transactions until a secondary verification is performed.
3. **SIM & IMEI Blacklisting:** Aggressive use of the **Sanchar Saathi** portal to block not just the SIM, but the entire handset (IMEI) of identified scammers. By January 2026, over 9 lakh SIMs have been blocked, but the goal is to make the hardware itself unusable for any network.

4. **Mule Account Liability:** Making banks legally and financially accountable for "Mule Accounts" opened with weak KYC. If a bank branch consistently hosts accounts used in scams, then penalize the branch or its management.
5. **"Cyber-Diplomacy":** India is pushing for a specialized **BRICS or G20 Cyber-Task Force** to allow for the rapid extradition of scammers and the dismantling of "Cyber-Slavery" compounds across borders.
6. **VoIP Regulation:** Tightening the gateway for international VoIP (Internet) calls that spoof Indian numbers (+91). The DoT is moving toward a system where unverified international headers are automatically dropped by telecom providers.
7. **Specialized Cyber-Courts:** To improve the currently low conviction rates, set up dedicated courts to handle digital fraud. The first conviction in 2025 (West Bengal) where nine scammers were given life imprisonment has set a precedent for "deterrence through harsh sentencing."
8. **Actions at the personal level:**
    a. **Staying Calm:** On receiving a suspicious call, one should do not panic. A person should take a moment to assess the situation.
    b. **Verification of Identity:** The personal information should not be shared over the phone or video calls.
    c. **Documenting Evidence:** A person should try to record the call or take screenshots for evidence. This documentation can be crucial in the times of need of reporting the scam.
    d. **Contacting Authorities:** In case of digital arrest cases, a person should report the incident to local police or through national cyber helplines (1930).
9. **Education and awareness:** Education and awareness is the key to avoid digital arrest frauds. Understanding that digital arrests are fraudulent can help the masses recognize and avoid such scams.

Conclusion: During one of his Mann Ki Baat addresses, the Prime Minister urged citizens to adopt the mantra "**Ruko, Socho, Action Lo**" (Stop, Think, Take Action) to combat digital arrest scams. This should become an immediate response at the individual level to prevent digital arrest fraud and protect citizens from financial exploitation.

Read More- The Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus- GS-3 Internal security challenges (Cyber Security)

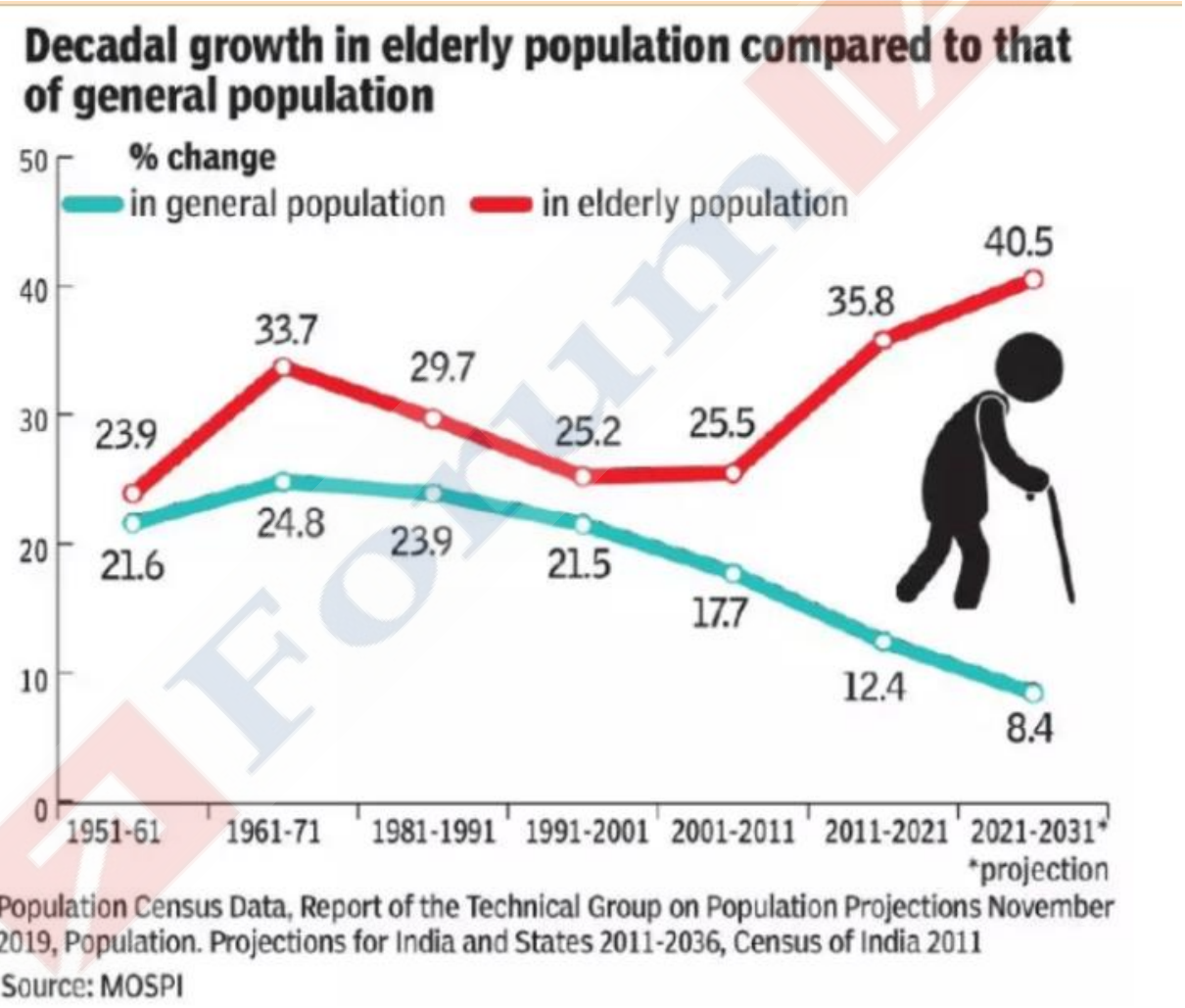
Elderly Care in India – Need & Challenges – Explained Pointwise

India is undergoing a significant demographic transition, with a steadily increasing proportion of its population entering old age. This has created a growing need for accessible healthcare, social security, financial support and institutional care for senior citizens. Recognising this challenge, the Keralam Government has introduced a series of initiatives for the welfare and protection of its rapidly ageing population. Keralam faces a significant demographic transition, with its population aged 60 and above projected to increase from approximately 16.5% to 23% by 2036.

What is the Status of Elderly Population in India?

- According to the Government of India and the United Nations, India currently has **more than 150 million** elderly people (about **10%** of total population), making it the **second-largest elderly population globally**.

- The number of elderlies (persons above 60 years) is set to increase from 100 million in 2011 to **230 million** in 2036 (about **15%** of the population). By 2050, the elderly population is expected to constitute nearly **one-fifth** of the total population, that is around 350 million.
- The population aged 80 years and above is expected to expand by a massive **279%** between 2022 and 2050, triggering an urgent demand for long-term palliative care.
- **Old Age-Dependence Ratio:**
    - The old age-dependence ratio denotes the number of persons aged 60-plus per 100 persons in the age group of 15-59 years.
    - According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MOSPI) **'Elderly in India 2021' report**, the old-age dependency ratio is increasing in India. The old age-dependence ratio has increased from 10.9% in 1961 to 14.2% in 2011, to 15.7% in 2021 and is projected to increase to 20.1% in 2031 respectively.



Source- MOSPI

- **Inter-State Variation:**

- The demographic transition happening in India is not even across the States. According to the RBI report, **Kerala & TN** will be "**ageing States**" by 2036 because their elderly populations will exceed 22% & 20% respectively.
- On the other hand, the **working age populations** of **Bihar, UP, Jharkhand** will continue to rise beyond 2031, **Karnataka & Maharashtra** occupy the middle ground – balancing growth with the onset of ageing pressure.

What is the need for taking care of the Elderly Population in India?

1. **Unlocking the "Silver Dividend"**: Healthy, well-supported seniors possess a lifetime of institutional knowledge, professional skills, and cultural wisdom. By keeping them healthy and integrated into society, India can leverage their potential for mentorship, community leadership, and part-time economic contributions – turning a perceived challenge into a national asset.
2. **Generational Link:** The elderly citizens provide a vital generational link for the upcoming generation, such as providing support and stability to families and society at large. **For e.g.** Grandparents in joint families provide a crucial link for transferring values and morals to the younger generation.
3. **Social Harmony:** The deep cultural impressions and social experiences of the elderly population in India provide the necessary buffer against intolerance, violence and hate crimes.
4. **Relieving Pressure on the Working-Age Workforce:** Without formal elder care infrastructure (like day-care centers, trained caregivers, and assisted living), the burden of full-time care falls on working-age children. This often forces women out of the workforce or reduces overall economic productivity as families struggle to balance work and caregiving.
5. **Moral and ethical responsibility:** It is the moral and ethical responsibility of the society to care for its people beyond their prime. This helps in reciprocating their lifetime of physical, social, emotional, and economic investment in the society.
6. **Constitutional Mandate: Article 41** of the Constitution of India directs the State to secure the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of old age, sickness, and disablement. Taking care of seniors is a fulfillment of this constitutional directive.

What are the Challenges Faced by Elderly Population in India?

Social Challenges	1. **Social Neglect:** Elderlies are increasingly being neglected by the younger generation due to various social reasons such as western education, globalisation, nuclear family structure. 2. **Abuse of the elderly population:** Elderlies in India face various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, psychological or financial. They suffer from emotional harm that emerges from verbal or emotional abuse. 3. **Inter-section of Caste and Elderly:** The lower caste elderly have to keep on working for livelihood even at old age due to financial issues. While for the upper caste elderlies, good jobs become less available and they hesitate to take menial jobs which creates a feeling of 'worthlessness' amongst them. 4. **Feminisation of ageing:** Ageing in India is increasingly female-centric. **Over 54% of elderly women are widows**, making them highly vulnerable to economic dependency, lack of property rights, and social isolation. The life of elderly widows is riddled with stringent moral codes of the society. Social bias against elderly women results in unjust allocation of resources, neglect, abuse, exploitation, gender-based violence, lack of access to basic services and prevention of ownership of assets.

Economic and Financial Challenges	1. **Lack of Social Security Protection:** Approximately **90% of India's workforce is in the informal sector** (agriculture, daily wage labor, domestic work). Consequently, an overwhelming majority of seniors do not have access to formal, employer-matched pensions or retirement benefits. 2. **Inadequate Government Safety Nets:** India spends only about 1% of its gross domestic product on pensions. While government pension schemes like the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) exist, the monthly payouts are heavily critiqued as being too low to cover basic nutritional and survival needs. 3. **Lack of housing and other basic amenities:** The housing available to a majority of the senior citizens are sometimes inappropriate and unsuitable to their requirement.
Health Issues and Challenges	1. **High Burden of Chronic Diseases:** Data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) reveals that nearly **75% of senior citizens suffer from at least one chronic illness** (such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, or severe arthritis). Multi-morbidity (suffering from two or more chronic conditions simultaneously) affects over half of the elderly population. 2. **Crippling Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** India has a remarkably low penetration of health insurance tailored for senior citizens. High premium rates and exclusions for pre-existing conditions mean that families must pay for treatments entirely out-of-pocket, frequently driving vulnerable families into poverty. 3. **Mental Health and Cognitive Decline:** Issues like depression, severe anxiety, and cognitive impairments (such as Alzheimer's and dementia) affect roughly 20% to 25% of the elderly. Mental health stigma, combined with a severe shortage of trained geriatric psychologists, leaves these conditions largely undiagnosed and untreated. 4. **Rural-Urban Healthcare Divide:** While 71% of India's elderly reside in rural villages, specialized tertiary healthcare facilities and doctors are heavily concentrated in urban centers, making access a geographic nightmare for frail seniors.

What are the Government initiatives for elderly care in India?

Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY)	It is an umbrella scheme that consolidates various efforts under a single, strategic framework aimed at improving the quality of life for senior citizens. The scheme has five key components that address different needs: 1. **Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens (IPSrC):** To provide institutional care. 2. **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY):** To provide Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices for Senior citizens belonging to the BPL category. 3. **Seniorcare Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE):** Aims to create Silver Economy. 4. **Senior Citizen Opportunities for Productive Engagement (SCOPE):** Portal that aims to utilize the experience, time and energy of the elderly population which can be used by the business enterprises looking for stable employees with experience.

	5. **State Action Plan for Senior Citizens (SAPSrC):** Empowers states to develop and implement their own action plans for elderly welfare.
National Policy for Older Persons 2011	The policy aims to encourage individuals to make provisions for their own and their spouse during old age, to bring non-governmental organizations for caring for older persons and to provide healthcare facilities to the elderly.
The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007	The Act provides a legal framework for the care of the elderly. It makes it a legal obligation for children and heirs to provide maintenance to their parents/senior citizens, a provision that is increasingly important as family structures change. The Act also provides for the establishment of old age homes and the protection of life and property of seniors.
National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	This is a social security program that provides a monthly pension to seniors living below the poverty line. Under the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)**, eligible individuals between 60-79 years receive **₹200 per month**, while those aged 80 and above receive **₹500 per month**.
Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana	The scheme aims to provide social security during old age. It also protects elderly persons aged 60 and above against a future fall in their interest income due to uncertain market conditions.
Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) Initiative and SAGE portal	This initiative aims to create a **"Silver Economy"** by identifying, evaluating, and supporting start-ups that develop innovative, age-friendly products and solutions to help seniors lead more independent lives.
Ayushman Bharat (AB-PMJAY) Expansion	Every senior citizen in India **aged 70 years and above is eligible for a ₹5 lakh annual free health insurance cover**, entirely irrespective of their socio-economic or income status. For families already covered under PMJAY, seniors over 70 get an exclusive, unshared ₹5 lakh top-up.

National Programme for the Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE)	This program provides dedicated healthcare delivery systems for seniors down to the grassroots level. It sets up 10-bed geriatric wards in district hospitals, runs weekly clinics at Primary Health Centers (PHCs), and establishes specialized **National Centres of Ageing (NCAs)** at premier medical colleges like AIIMS New Delhi for tertiary research and palliative care.
Elderline (14567)	A national, toll-free helpline number specifically operationalized to support senior citizens. It offers immediate real-time support across India for grief counseling, guidance against elder abuse, clarity on pension schemes, and emergency rescue operations for abandoned citizens.

What initiatives has the Keralam Government introduced for the welfare of the elderly population?

Keralam Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026	● Keralam became the first State in India to pass a comprehensive legislation specifically aimed at protecting senior citizens. ● Key provisions include: ○ **Protection from abuse:** Legal safeguards against physical, emotional and financial exploitation of elderly people. ○ **Property protection:** Provisions against illegally possessing or taking control of senior citizens' property. ○ **Regulation of old-age homes**: Registration, regulation and monitoring of institutions providing elderly care. ○ **Healthcare and social security:** Improved access to healthcare and welfare services. ○ **Silver economy:** Encouraging senior citizens to use their knowledge, skills and professional experience for productive activities.
Dedicated Department for Senior Citizens	● In May 2026, the Keralam Government announced the establishment of a separate department for elderly welfare. ● It aims to address the challenges arising from Kerala's rapidly ageing population. ● It will focus on specialised healthcare, geriatric care and social protection. ● The initiative draws inspiration from international elderly-care systems, including Japan's model.
Annual Dementia Screening Initiative	● Kerala is planning annual cognitive screening of its entire population aged 60 and above to enable early detection of dementia. ● Screening through Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in rural areas and the **Vayomithram programme** in urban areas. ● Involvement of ASHA and Anganwadi workers.

	• Establishment of memory clinics across all 14 districts. • Expansion of dedicated dementia-care centres.

What should be the Way Forward?

1. **Formalization of caregiving economy:**
    - According to a NITI Aayog report, healthcare offered at home can replace up to 65% of unnecessary hospital visits and reduce hospital costs by 20%.
    - Well-trained caregivers possessing empathetic outlook towards elderly need to be provided formal and better work place conditions.
    - Recognition of "home" as a place for providing care and as a "place of work" for caregivers will be the first step towards elderly care.
2. **Reforming the National Pension System:** The current monthly payouts under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) need to be systematically revised and pegged to inflation indices to ensure they cover basic living and nutritional costs.
3. **Strengthen Geriatric Healthcare Infrastructure**: India must **establish geriatric departments in all medical colleges** and increase the number of specialist physicians. States like Tamil Nadu have already recommended creating geriatric units in every medical college as a model to follow.
4. **Replication of Switzerland's TIME BANK initiative:** Under this initiative, the younger generation start to save 'time' by taking care of senior citizens. Later, they can use the saved 'time' when they get old, sick, or in need of someone to take care of them. This initiative must be applied to Indian setup.
5. **Incentivizing the "Silver Economy":** The government should offer tax incentives, subsidies, and grants to startups and private enterprises developing senior-friendly technologies, assistive devices, universal design infrastructure, and specialized senior living communities.
6. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Private healthcare providers should be incentivized to establish specialized geriatric wings and day-care centers in semi-urban and rural areas, backed by state viability gap funding.
7. **Address the Feminisation of Ageing**: Since over 50% of elderly women are widows facing social exclusion, targeted policy must ensure **property rights, survivor pensions, access to healthcare, and legal protections** for elderly women – especially in rural areas where vulnerability is highest.
8. **Rationalisation of subsidies:** The RBI report recommends the ageing States to rationalize their subsidies to afford rising pension costs & youthful States to invest heavily in human capital.

Conclusion: India must transition from viewing elderly people as passive recipients of welfare to recognising them as valuable members of society. A comprehensive, inclusive and rights-based elderly care framework is essential to ensure that ageing in India is accompanied by dignity, security and a better quality of life.

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