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- Earth Hour 2026
- Tourism and trade
- Olive Ridely Turtle
- Lok Sabha Speaker
- AI in School Education
- India-Russia RELOS Pact
- S-400 Triumf (Sudarshan) System
- Climate change as a public health emergency

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Limits of neutrality in addressing caste

Why in News: The Supreme Court stayed UGC Equity Regulations, 2026, amid debate on caste-based discrimination definitions, highlighting concerns over inclusion, constitutional equality, and institutional accountability in higher education.

Key Details

- Focus on **caste-based discrimination** in higher education
- Originates from **student suicides and systemic bias case**
- Debate over **caste-neutral vs targeted definition**
- Emphasis on **substantive equality (Articles 14 & 15)**
- Need for **strong enforcement and accountability mechanisms**

Background and Context

- The Supreme Court issued an interim stay on the **UGC Equity Regulations, 2026**.
- These regulations stem from a case addressing caste discrimination and student suicides.
- The case exposes **systemic failures** in ensuring equality in higher education.
- Focus is on creating inclusive and safe institutional environments.
- Highlights urgency of **addressing structural discrimination**.

Definition of Caste-Based Discrimination

- Defined as discrimination against **SCs, STs, and OBCs**.
- Targets historically marginalised communities.
- Recognises caste as a **structural issue**, not isolated acts.
- Aims for clarity rather than **exclusion**.
- Focuses on systemic **inequality embedded in institutions**.

Limitations of Caste-Neutral Approach

- Critics argue for inclusion of “**general category**” students.
- Neutrality assumes equal impact of discrimination across groups.
- Ignores **structural hierarchies and power imbalances**.
- Risks equating systemic **oppression with individual bias**.
- Weakens targeted **legal protection** against caste-based harm.

Constitutional Perspective on Equality

- Article 14 ensures **equality before law**.
- Article 15 **allows special provisions** for disadvantaged groups.
- Promotes **substantive equality**, not just formal equality.
- Recognises need for **differential treatment** to correct injustice.
- Rejects **one-size-fits-all neutrality** in unequal societies.

Importance of Effective Implementation

- Main issue lies in **weak enforcement** and accountability.
- Need for **independent complaint mechanisms**.

- Ensure **time-bound investigations** and transparency.
- Require **audits, monitoring, and institutional responsibility**.
- Strong **implementation is key** to achieving real equality.

Conclusion

The debate on UGC Equity Regulations highlights the **tension between formal neutrality and substantive equality**. Addressing caste-based discrimination requires recognising structural inequalities rather than adopting a uniform approach. **Strengthening implementation, accountability, and institutional responsiveness** is crucial. Only a robust, **context-sensitive** framework can ensure dignity, inclusion, and justice for historically marginalised students in higher education.

Fear of the foreign

Why in News: The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, have sparked debate after introducing provisions for asset seizure by a designated authority, raising concerns over transparency, fairness, and misuse of power.

Key Details

- Introduces a **designated authority** to control assets of organisations losing FCRA licence
- Allows **automatic seizure of assets** without judicial process
- Raises concerns over **violation of natural justice and due process**
- Criticised for **opacity and selective enforcement** of foreign funding rules
- Disproportionate impact feared on **NGOs and minority-run institutions**

Proposed FCRA Amendments: Key Concerns

- The **Central Government** plans to restrict foreign contributions in a **selective and non-transparent** manner.
- New amendments to the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA)** aim to increase government control over recipients of foreign funds.
- The Bill was introduced in the **Lok Sabha on March 25, 2026**, but is currently **paused due to protests**.
- It proposes creating a “**designated authority**” with sweeping powers over organisations losing FCRA registration.
- The move is justified on grounds of **national security and foreign interference**, but raises concerns about intent and fairness.

Powers of the Designated Authority

- The authority can **seize, manage, and dispose of assets** of organisations whose FCRA licence is cancelled.

- Assets include **schools, hospitals, and religious institutions** built using foreign funds.
- Control over assets would be **automatic and immediate** after licence cancellation.
- No **judicial review or adjudication process** is required before such action.
- This creates a situation where the government can **withdraw permission and benefit from it simultaneously**.

Issues of Fairness and Natural Justice

- The process is seen as **arbitrary and procedurally unfair**.
- It violates the principle of **natural justice**, as no hearing or appeal is guaranteed.
- Assets created **legally before licence cancellation** may still be seized.
- This raises concerns about **retrospective penalisation**.
- Minority groups, especially **Christian organisations**, fear disproportionate impact due to their reliance on foreign funding.

Concerns Over Transparency and Selectivity

- The government's approach appears **opaque and uneven** in granting or cancelling FCRA licences.
- Questions in Parliament regarding FCRA data have reportedly been **disallowed since 2024**.
- This fuels suspicion of **favouritism in allowing foreign funding**.
- Regulatory credibility depends on **consistency and transparency**, which appear lacking.
- The contrast is evident as India **welcomes foreign investment in sectors like infrastructure and technology**, but restricts NGOs.

Background of FCRA Evolution

- The FCRA was first enacted in **1976**.
- It was **re-enacted in 2010** during the UPA government.
- Further **tightened in 2020** under the current government.
- Each amendment has progressively **increased restrictions on foreign funding**.
- The latest proposal continues this trend of **greater central control**.

Way Forward

- The government should **reconsider the proposed amendments**.
- Any regulation must be **transparent, fair, and non-discriminatory**.
- Safeguards like **judicial oversight and due process** are essential.
- Policies should avoid **arbitrary seizure of legally created assets**.
- A balanced framework is needed to **protect national interests without undermining civil society**.

Conclusion

The proposed **FCRA amendments risk** undermining trust in regulatory governance by enabling arbitrary state control over legally acquired assets. While national security is important, **excessive executive discretion** without transparency or judicial safeguards threatens civil society functioning. A balanced approach ensuring fairness, accountability, and

respect for natural justice is essential to maintain credibility and democratic values in regulating foreign contributions.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

“The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 raise serious concerns regarding transparency, natural justice, and federal balance.” Critically examine. (15 marks, 250 words)

The Supreme Court of India

Why in News: The Supreme Court of India is in news due to ongoing Sabarimala-related hearings on **temple entry and equality**, rulings on freedom of speech (obscenity limits), and debates on judicial **reforms and inclusivity**, reflecting its active role in social and constitutional issues

Key Details

- The Supreme Court of India is the **highest judicial authority** in India
- Established on **28 January 1950**
- It replaced the **Federal Court of India** and the **Judicial Committee of the Privy Council**
- Functions as the **guardian of the Constitution**

Constitutional Provisions

- Mentioned in **Part V (Articles 124–147)** of the Constitution of India
- Article 124 provides for **establishment and composition**
- Parliament can **increase the number of judges**

Composition of the Court

- Consists of:
 - **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**
 - Other judges (currently sanctioned strength: **34**)
- Judges are appointed by the President of India
- Appointment follows the **Collegium System**

Qualifications of Judges

- A person must:
 - Be a **citizen of India**
 - Have been a **High Court judge for 5 years**, OR
 - An **advocate for 10 years**, OR
 - A **distinguished jurist** (rarely used provision)

Tenure and Removal

- Judges serve till **65 years of age**
- Can resign to the **President**
- Removal through **impeachment** by Parliament on grounds of:
 - Proven misbehavior
 - Incapacity

Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court

a) Original Jurisdiction

- Disputes between:
 - Centre and States
 - States vs States

- Matters involving **fundamental rights (Article 32)**

b) Appellate Jurisdiction

- Appeals from:
 - High Courts
 - Civil, criminal, and constitutional cases

c) Advisory Jurisdiction

Lok Sabha Speaker

Why in News: The Lok Sabha session is in news due to disruptions, key Bills, and debates over Speaker's impartiality, opposition protests, and legislative procedures affecting democratic functioning.

Key Details

- The **Speaker**, a constitutional authority under **Articles 93–110**, ensures the **orderly functioning of the House**.
- Authority over **Money Bill certification** and **anti-defection decisions** significantly shapes the **federal balance** and **judicial discourse**.
- **Neutrality** is essential to safeguard **opposition rights** and uphold **parliamentary credibility**.
- An **impartial Speaker** reinforces **democratic stability**, enhances **public trust**, and acts as a check on **executive dominance**.

Constitutional Connections

The **Speaker of Lok Sabha** links the **Constitution** with **day-to-day parliamentary practice**, ensuring **Articles 93–110** are meaningfully applied.

- Acts as a bridge between the **legislature and executive** by regulating government business without formally belonging to the executive.

Legislature–Judiciary linkages

- Decisions on **Money Bills** and **anti-defection cases** often shape **judicial review debates**, highlighting tensions between **parliamentary sovereignty** and **constitutional supremacy**.
- Courts generally respect the Speaker's authority, reinforcing legislative autonomy.

Centre–State and Federal Linkages

- Certification of **Money Bills** affects the role of the **Rajya Sabha**, influencing India's **federal balance**.
- Strong Speaker impartiality protects the voice of **States' interests** indirectly represented in Parliament.

Party System and Democratic Norms

- Though elected on a **party ticket**, the Speaker is expected to rise above party politics, linking **ethics** with **institutional trust**.
- **Impartial functioning** safeguards the **rights of the opposition**, whereas **partisan conduct** can erode **democratic legitimacy**.
- By **sending Bills to parliamentary committees**, the Speaker links the **legislative process** with **expert examination** and **greater accountability**.
- Effective use of these powers improves **policy quality** and limits executive dominance.

Public Trust and Democratic Stability

- The Speaker's **neutrality** links **citizen confidence** with **institutional stability**.
- An impartial Speaker reinforces Parliament as the **central arena of democracy**, not merely a government-controlled forum.

- Under Article 143
- President of India can seek advice on legal matters

Powers of the Supreme Court

- **Judicial Review**
 - Can declare laws unconstitutional
- **Judicial Activism**
 - Expands rights through interpretation
- **Court of Record**
 - Its judgments are binding
 - Can punish for **contempt of court**

Role as Guardian of Fundamental Rights

- Article 32 allows citizens to directly approach the Court
- Can issue writs like:
 - Habeas Corpus
 - Mandamus
 - Certiorari
 - Prohibition
 - Quo Warranto

Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

- Allows any citizen to approach the Court for **public welfare**
- Promotes **access to justice** for weaker sections
- Relaxation of strict legal procedures

Independence of Judiciary

- Ensured by:
 - **Security of tenure**
 - **Fixed salaries**
 - **Removal procedure**
 - Separation from executive

Landmark Judgments

- Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala
 - Introduced **Basic Structure Doctrine**
- Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India
 - Expanded **Article 21 (Right to Life)**
- Minerva Mills v. Union of India
 - Strengthened judicial review

Seat and Benches

- Located in **New Delhi**
- Can sit in **multiple benches**
- Constitution allows benches elsewhere, but currently only Delhi

Importance of Supreme Court

- Protects **democracy and rule of law**
- Maintains **federal balance**
- Safeguards **citizens' rights**
- Ensures **constitutional supremacy**

Conclusion

The **Supreme Court of India** stands as the **guardian of the Constitution**, ensuring justice, protecting fundamental rights, and maintaining the federal balance. Through judicial review and activism, it **upholds the rule of law and democratic values**. Its role remains crucial in **safeguarding citizens' liberties** and preserving constitutional supremacy in India's evolving political and social landscape.

PARLIAMENT OVER THE DECADES

■ The number of sittings in the Lok Sabha has gone down from an average of 121 days a year between 1952-70 to 68 days since 2000.

■ The 17th Lok Sabha between 2019 and 2024 had the fewest sittings (274) for a full-term house.

■ The 17th Lok Sabha did not elect a Deputy Speaker for the entire term in what was a first for the lower house. The post remains vacant in the ongoing 18th Lok Sabha.



Worst washouts in the last two decades

Session	Lok Sabha %	Rajya Sabha %
Winter Session of 2010	Lok Sabha 5%	Rajya Sabha 2%
Winter Session of 2013	Lok Sabha 8%	Rajya Sabha 19%
Winter Session of 2016	Lok Sabha 15%	Rajya Sabha 18%
Budget Session of 2014	Lok Sabha 21%	Rajya Sabha 27%
Budget Session of 2018	Lok Sabha 21%	Rajya Sabha 27%

18th Lok Sabha so far

Session	The Lok Sabha functioned for 95 % of its duration	Rajya Sabha 101%
First Session	Lok Sabha 135%	Rajya Sabha 112%
Budget Session 2024	Lok Sabha 52%	Rajya Sabha 39%
Winter Session 2024	Lok Sabha 111%	Rajya Sabha 112%
Budget Session 2025	Lok Sabha 29 %	Rajya Sabha 34%
Monsoon Session 2025 was a washout		

(Credit: PRS Legislative Research)

2004-2024 in a nutshell

14th Lok Sabha (2004-2009):

Sittings	332 days
Time utilised	87%
Bills passed	248
Bills sent to committees	60%

15th Lok Sabha (2009-2014):

Sittings	356 days
Time utilised	61%
Bills passed	179
Bills sent to committees	71%

16th Lok Sabha (2014-2019):

Sittings	331 days
Time utilised	84%
Bills passed	133
Bills sent to committees	25%

17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024):

Sittings	274 days
Time utilised	88%
Bills passed	179
Bills sent to committees	16%

Conclusion

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha holds a **crucial constitutional role**, representing neutrality and institutional integrity. Voluntarily stepping aside on moral grounds strengthens public confidence and **upholds parliamentary ethics**. Maintaining impartiality, constitutional equilibrium, and democratic values is vital to preserve the credibility of Parliament and ensure a robust legislative democracy in India.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Discuss the constitutional powers and functions of the Speaker under Articles 93-110. How do these impact legislative functioning? (10 Marks, 150 words)

Delimitation in India

Why in News: The debate over **delimitation post-2026** has intensified due to concerns regarding **population-based seat redistribution**, **north-south political imbalance**, **value of vote**, and its implications for **Indian federalism** and democratic representation.

Key Details

- The **Delimitation Commission** is an independent **statutory body** established under a Delimitation Act passed by Parliament of India.
- It is appointed by the President of India and functions independently of executive interference.
- It redraws boundaries of **Lok Sabha** and **State Legislative Assembly** constituencies based on Census data.
- The current freeze on seat allocation continues till **2026** under the **84th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001**.
- The Commission's decisions are **final and binding** and cannot be challenged in any court of law.

Delimitation: Meaning & Constitutional Basis

- **Meaning of Delimitation:** Delimitation refers to the process of **redrawing electoral constituency boundaries** and allocating seats to ensure fair representation based on population changes.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** **Article 82** provides for readjustment of Lok Sabha seats after every Census, while **Article 170** deals with State Assembly constituencies.
- **Principle of Equal Representation:** Delimitation is based on the democratic principle of **"one person, one vote, one value"**, ensuring relatively equal population representation across constituencies.
- **Independent Mechanism:** The Delimitation Commission functions as an independent statutory authority whose orders have the **force of law**, ensuring neutrality and preventing political manipulation.

• SPLITTING 543 SEATS AMONG THE STATES

Current seat share based on the 1971 census compared with 2026 projections

state/union territories	Current seat (1971 census)	seat based on 2026 population estimates	seat gained	state/union territories	Current seat (1971 census)	seat based on 2026 population estimates	seat lost
Uttar Pradesh	80	92	+12	Tamil Nadu	39	29	-10
Bihar	40	50	+10	Kerala	20	13	-7
Rajasthan	25	32	+7	Andhra Pradesh	25	20	-5
Madhya Pradesh	29	34	+5	West Bengal	42	38	-4
Gujarat	26	28	+2	Odisha	21	18	-3
Haryana	10	12	+2	Telangana	17	14	-3
Maharashtra	48	49	+1	Karnataka	28	26	-2
Jharkhand	14	15	+1	Punjab	13	12	-1
Chhattisgarh	11	12	+1	Uttarakhand	5	4	-1
NCT of Delhi	7	8	+1	Himachal Pradesh	4	3	-1
Total	290	332	+42	Arunachal Pradesh	2	1	-1
The remaining 29 seats are split between Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim, Nagaland, Mizoram, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Puducherry, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Ladakh. These states and Union Territories will not gain or lose any Lok Sabha seat.				Manipur	2	1	-1
				Tripura	2	1	-1
				Meghalaya	2	1	-1
				Goa	2	1	-1
				Total	224	182	-42

Historical Evolution of Delimitation in India

- **Early Delimitation Exercises:** Delimitation Commissions were constituted in **1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002**, based on the **1951, 1961, 1971, and 2001 Census** respectively.
- **42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976):** During the Emergency, seat allocation was frozen based on the **1971 Census** till 2001 to encourage population control measures.
- **84th Constitutional Amendment (2001):** The freeze was extended till **2026**, although constituency boundaries could be readjusted based on the 2001 Census without altering seat numbers.
- **Current Scenario:** India still follows largely **1971-based seat allocation**, despite population increasing from nearly **55 crores to over 1.4 billion**, leading to representational distortions.

Malapportionment & Value of Vote

- **Unequal Representation:** States with high population growth such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are underrepresented compared to southern states.
- **Vote Value Disparity:** An MP in Kerala represents nearly **17–18 lakh people**, while an MP in Bihar may represent over **30 lakh people**, creating unequal vote value.
- **Concept of Malapportionment:** It refers to mismatch between population share and seat share, weakening the principle of democratic equality.
- **Democratic Implication:** Citizens in populous states effectively possess reduced political representation per vote.

North-South Divide & Federal Concerns

- **Regional Imbalance:** Northern states are likely to gain seats post-delimitation, while southern states may lose proportional representation.
- **Population Control Debate:** Southern states argue they should not be penalised for successfully implementing population stabilisation policies and improving social indicators.
- **Federal Tensions:** Redistribution of seats may shift political power toward densely populated states, impacting coalition politics and policy priorities.
- **Linguistic & Regional Sensitivity:** Since states were reorganised largely on linguistic lines, delimitation has implications for regional identity and federal bargaining power.

Fiscal Federalism & Political Economy

- **Revenue vs Representation Paradox:** Economically stronger southern states contribute higher tax revenues but may lose parliamentary influence after delimitation.
- **Centralised Fiscal Structure:** The Union government controls a large share of revenues, while states rely significantly on Finance Commission transfers.
- **Horizontal Distribution Issues:** Population-based devolution formulas often favour poorer and more populous states.
- **Political Economy Concern:** Reduced representation may weaken richer states' influence over fiscal policy and national resource allocation.

Governance & Representation Challenges

- **Large Constituency Size:** Indian MPs represent approximately **15–30 lakh people**, significantly higher than many global democracies.
- **Accountability Concerns:** Larger constituencies reduce effective citizen-representative interaction and grievance redressal.
- **Legislative Burden:** Overburdened MPs may struggle to balance legislative duties, executive oversight, and constituency management.
- **Comparative Perspective:** Democracies with smaller constituency sizes often demonstrate better political accountability and responsiveness.

Delimitation & Comparative Federal Models

- **Indian Model:** Representation in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha is significantly population-linked, unlike classical federations.
- **US Federal Example:** In United States, the House of Representatives is population-based while the Senate provides equal state representation.
- **Indian Challenge:** India lacks a strong equal-representation mechanism for states in the Upper House, increasing concerns of dominance by populous states.
- **Need for Federal Balance:** A balanced model is needed to reconcile democratic equality with cooperative federalism.

Importance of Delimitation

- Ensures **fair political representation** and electoral equality.
- Strengthens representative democracy and legitimacy of elections.
- Reflects changing demographic realities and migration patterns.
- Prevents long-term representational distortions and malapportionment.
- Supports constitutional governance and accountability.

Way Forward

- **Expand Lok Sabha Strength:** Increasing total Lok Sabha seats can reduce constituency size and improve representation without drastically reducing any state's share.
- **Balanced Delimitation Formula:** A calibrated approach combining population, governance indicators, and federal equity may reduce tensions.
- **Strengthen Rajya Sabha:** Enhancing the federal role of Rajya Sabha can protect interests of smaller and economically stronger states.
- **Promote Cooperative Federalism:** Consensus-building among states is essential to maintain national unity and democratic legitimacy.

Conclusion

Delimitation is essential for maintaining the democratic principle of **equal representation**, but the upcoming post-2026 exercise also raises complex issues of **federal balance**, **regional equity**, and **political representation**. A balanced and consensus-driven approach will be necessary to ensure that India's electoral system remains both democratic and federal in spirit.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which Constitutional Amendment froze Lok Sabha seat allocation based on the 1971 Census?

- (a) 44th
- (b) 42nd
- (c) 86th
- (d) 73rd

Answer: (b)

Chief Minister: Appointment, Powers, and Removal

Why in News: Bihar politics is in focus as **Samrat Choudhary** is set to become the first BJP Chief Minister, staking claim before Governor **Syed Ata Hasnain** to form a new NDA government.

Key Details

- The **Chief Minister** is the **real executive head** of the State under **Article 164**.
- Appointed by the **Governor**, usually from the **majority party/coalition**.
- Must maintain **majority support** in the Legislative Assembly.
- Heads the **Council of Ministers**, ensuring **collective responsibility**.
- Can be removed mainly through **loss of majority (floor test)**.
- Other removal modes include **resignation, disqualification, or President's Rule**.

Chief Minister: Position & Appointment

- The **Chief Minister** is the **real executive head** of the State; the Governor is only the **constitutional head**.
- Appointed by the **Governor** under **Article 164**.
- Normally, the **leader of the majority party/coalition** in the Legislative Assembly is invited.
- In case of a **hung assembly**, the Governor may exercise discretion in appointing the CM.
- A person who is not a legislator can be appointed but must **get elected within 6 months**.

Tenure & Majority Support

- Holds office “**during the pleasure of the Governor**”, but practically depends on **Assembly majority**.
- No fixed tenure; continues as long as **confidence of the House is retained**.
- Must **prove majority** if doubt arises (floor test).
- Loss of coalition support can reduce majority.
- Minority governments survive through **outside support**.

Collective Responsibility

- The **Council of Ministers** is **collectively responsible** to the Legislative Assembly.
- The CM is the **head of the Council of Ministers** and coordinates their functioning.
- If the CM resigns, the **entire Council stands dissolved automatically**.

- Ministers hold office at the **pleasure of the Governor**, but effectively under CM's advice.
- CM can **recommend removal of ministers** to the Governor.

Removal by Loss of Majority

- Most common method: **defeat in a floor test** in the Legislative Assembly.
- Can arise due to **no-confidence motion** or withdrawal of support.
- Supreme Court has emphasized **floor test as the proper method** to determine majority.
- Speaker plays a key role in **conducting proceedings**.
- Failure to prove majority leads to **resignation or dismissal**.

Removal by Governor

- Governor may dismiss the CM if they **refuse to resign after losing majority**.
- This power is **exceptional and controversial**.
- Must be exercised in line with **constitutional morality**.
- Subject to **judicial review** by courts.
- Arbitrary dismissal has been criticized in several cases.

Resignation by Chief Minister

- CM may resign **voluntarily** due to political crises, defeat, or moral responsibility.
- Resignation is submitted to the **Governor**.
- Often occurs after **electoral defeat** or internal party conflict.
- CM may continue as **caretaker** till a new government is formed.
- Entire Council of Ministers resigns along with the CM.

Other Situations of Removal

- If CM **ceases to be a member** of the legislature and fails to get elected within **6 months**.
- Disqualification under laws like the **Anti-Defection Law**.
- Death or serious incapacity creates a vacancy.
- Imposition of **President's Rule (Article 356)** leads to removal of the State government.
- Court decisions (e.g., conviction leading to disqualification) can also force removal.

Conclusion

The Chief Minister occupies a central position in State governance, combining political leadership with **executive authority**. While formally appointed by the Governor, the office's **stability rests on legislative majority**. Removal mechanisms, especially the floor test, uphold democratic accountability. Overall, the system ensures that the **Chief Minister remains answerable** to the elected Assembly, reinforcing responsible government and constitutional balance in States.

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

Why in News: Recent debates on the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act have intensified after court **observations on bail provisions**, prolonged detention, and concerns over **misuse against activists**, highlighting tensions between security and civil liberties.

Key Details

- **Primary anti-terror law** aimed at protecting sovereignty and integrity of India

- Allows **designation of individuals and organisations as terrorists**
- Provides for **extended detention and stringent bail conditions**

- Empowers agencies like **NIA** with wider investigative authority
- Criticised for **low conviction rates and potential misuse**
- Raises concerns over **civil liberties and due process**

UAPA

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967



Context:

Delhi Police contended in the Supreme Court that, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), the provision of supplying the grounds of arrest in writing is not strictly necessary.



ANTI-TERROR LAW

UAPA is India's premier anti-terror law, succeeding the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, which lapsed in 1995, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), repealed in 2004.

POWER TO UNION GOVERNMENT

The Union Government holds absolute power, allowing it to declare an activity as unlawful through Gazette notification.



Charge sheet before 180 days

The investigating agency must file a charge sheet within a maximum of 180 days after arrest, with the possibility of extension after informing the court.

2019 Amendment to UAPA:



Empowers the Union Government to designate individuals as terrorists based on specified grounds in the Act.



Grants the Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) the authority to approve the seizure or attachment of property.

Background and Objective

- Enacted in 1967 to **prevent unlawful activities threatening India's sovereignty and integrity**
- Strengthened over time to address **terrorism and national security challenges**
- Empowers the State to act against **secessionist and anti-national activities**
- Expanded after major terror incidents to include **counter-terror provisions**
- Serves as India's **primary anti-terror legislation**

Key Provisions

- Allows **designation of individuals and organisations as terrorists**
- Provides for **extended detention and investigation periods**
- Permits **attachment and seizure of property linked to terrorism**
- Establishes **special courts for speedy trials**
- Imposes **strict bail conditions**, making release difficult

Amendments and Evolution

- Major amendments in **2004, 2008, 2012, and 2019**
- 2019 amendment enabled **individuals (not just organisations) to be labelled terrorists**
- Enhanced powers for **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**

- Expanded scope to include **terror financing and cyber activities**
- Reflects shift toward a **more stringent security framework**

Concerns and Criticisms

- Criticised for **potential misuse against dissent and activists**
- **Stringent bail provisions** raise issues of prolonged incarceration
- Low conviction rates highlight concerns of **procedural fairness**
- Risk of **overreach and violation of civil liberties**
- Often seen as prioritising **state power over individual rights**

Judicial and Legal Safeguards

- Courts emphasise **strict scrutiny in application of provisions**
- Supreme Court has stressed **balance between security and liberty**
- Requirement of **sanction before prosecution in certain cases**
- Judicial review acts as a **check on arbitrary use**
- Ongoing debates on **reforms and safeguards**

Significance and Way Forward

- Remains crucial for **counter-terrorism and national security**
- Needs **clear safeguards to prevent misuse**
- Emphasis on **accountability and transparency in enforcement**
- Strengthening **judicial oversight and timely trials** is essential
- Balancing **security with democratic freedoms** is the key challenge

Conclusion

The UAPA **remains a critical legal** tool for safeguarding national security, but its stringent provisions risk undermining civil liberties if misapplied. Ensuring a balance between effective **counter-terrorism** and constitutional freedoms requires stronger judicial oversight, transparent enforcement, and timely trials. Reforming **procedural safeguards** while preserving its core objective is essential to maintain both security and democratic integrity in India.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in State Elections

Why in News: The Model Code of Conduct is in news due to recent state election announcements, prompting the **Election Commission of India** to enforce strict guidelines on campaigning and government conduct.

Key Details

- The MCC ensures **free and fair elections** by regulating political parties and candidates during the election period.
- It comes into force **immediately after election dates are announced** and remains till results are declared.
- The ruling government is restricted from **announcing new schemes or using official machinery for campaigns**.
- Political parties must **avoid hate speech, bribery, and misuse of religion or caste for votes**.
- The Election Commission monitors violations through **observers, flying squads, and strict enforcement mechanisms**.

Meaning and Purpose

- The **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India to regulate the behaviour of political parties and candidates during elections.
- Its main purpose is to ensure **free, fair, and transparent elections** by preventing misuse of power and unfair practices.
- It creates a **level playing field** so that no party gets an undue advantage during the election period.
- The MCC promotes **ethical campaigning** and discourages corrupt or divisive activities.
- It helps maintain **public confidence in the electoral process**.

When MCC Comes into Force

- The MCC comes into effect **immediately after the announcement of the election schedule** by the Election Commission.
- It remains in force **until the completion of the election process**, including declaration of results.

- It applies to **all political parties, candidates, and government authorities** involved in elections.
- During this period, **strict monitoring** is carried out to ensure compliance.
- Any violation can lead to **warnings, notices, or legal action** by the Commission.

Rules for Political Parties and Candidates

- Political parties must **avoid hate speech, personal attacks, and use of religion or caste for votes**.
- Candidates must **not bribe voters or distribute money, gifts, or liquor** to influence voting.
- Campaigning should be conducted in a **peaceful and respectful manner** without disturbing public order.
- Parties must **respect opposition leaders and avoid spreading false information**.
- All campaign activities must comply with **laws and instructions issued by the Election Commission**.

Restrictions on Government Activities

- The ruling government must **not announce new schemes, projects, or policies** that could influence voters.
- Ministers and officials must **not use official machinery, vehicles, or public funds for campaigning**.
- Public places and government resources must be used **fairly and without bias**.
- Advertisements funded by the government that promote achievements are **restricted during this period**.
- Transfers and appointments of officials require **prior approval from the Election Commission**.

Campaign Regulations

- Campaigns must follow **prescribed time limits and noise regulations** to avoid public disturbance.
- Use of loudspeakers and rallies must be conducted **with proper permissions from authorities**.
- Parties must **maintain transparency in campaign expenditure** and follow spending limits.
- Posters, banners, and hoardings must be placed **only at permitted locations**.
- Media and social media campaigning must **avoid fake news and misinformation**.

Enforcement and Importance

- The Election Commission ensures enforcement through **flying squads, observers, and monitoring teams**.
- Violations of MCC can result in **censure, FIRs, or even disqualification in serious cases**.
- Though not legally binding, the MCC carries **strong moral authority and public accountability**.
- It plays a crucial role in **maintaining democratic integrity during state elections**.
- Overall, the MCC ensures that elections are conducted in a **fair, orderly, and credible manner**.

Conclusion

The **Model Code of Conduct** plays a vital role in safeguarding democratic values during elections. It ensures fairness, transparency, and accountability among political stakeholders. By restricting misuse of power and promoting ethical campaigning, it strengthens public trust in the electoral process. Effective enforcement by the Election Commission is

essential to maintain the credibility and integrity of state elections in India.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Discuss the significance of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in ensuring free and fair elections in India. Examine its key provisions, limitations, and suggest measures to strengthen its enforcement by the Election Commission of India." (15 marks, 250 words)

Vice President of India: Constitutional Role

Why in News: Recently, Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan met Anura Kumara Disanayake to strengthen India–Sri Lanka ties, focusing on energy projects like Trincomalee hub, boosting regional cooperation and strategic development.

Key Details

- The **Vice President is the second-highest constitutional authority** under **Article 63** and plays both executive and legislative roles.
- The Vice President is **elected indirectly by members of both Houses of Parliament** using proportional representation as per **Article 66**.
- The Vice President serves as the **ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**, ensuring orderly conduct of proceedings.
- The Vice President **acts as President in case of vacancy**, maintaining continuity in governance under **Article 65**.
- The tenure is **five years**, with removal possible by a resolution of Parliament under **Article 67**.
- The office is largely **ceremonial in executive matters but significant in legislative functioning**.

Constitutional Position

- The **Vice President of India is the second-highest constitutional office** in the country and acts as a key link in the executive and legislative framework.
- The office is created under **Article 63**, which mandates that there shall be a Vice President of India.
- The Vice President also serves as the **ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**, giving the office a crucial legislative role.

Election Process

- The Vice President is **elected indirectly by an electoral college** consisting of members of both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha).
- The election is conducted in accordance with **Article 66**.
- The voting system follows **proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote**, ensuring fair representation.

Qualifications

- A candidate must be a **citizen of India** to be eligible for the office of Vice President.
- The person must have **completed 35 years of age** and possess the qualifications required to be a member of the Rajya Sabha.
- The candidate **must not hold any office of profit** under the Government to ensure neutrality.
- These conditions are specified under **Article 66(3)**.

Term and Removal

- The Vice President holds office for a **term of five years**, but can continue until a successor assumes office.
- The provisions regarding tenure are laid down under **Article 67**.
- The Vice President can be **removed by a resolution of the Rajya Sabha**, agreed to by the Lok Sabha, reflecting parliamentary control.

Powers and Functions (Executive Role)

- The Vice President **acts as the President of India in case of vacancy**, such as death, resignation, or removal of the President.
- During such periods, the Vice President **discharges all functions of the President**, ensuring continuity in governance.
- This role is governed by **Article 65**.

Powers and Functions (Legislative Role)

- As the **Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**, the Vice President presides over its sessions and maintains order in the House.
- The Vice President **decides on procedural matters and ensures smooth conduct of debates**.
- The Vice President **casts a vote only in case of a tie**, thereby acting as a neutral authority in legislative proceedings.

Limitations of Office

- The Vice President **does not have significant independent executive powers** in normal circumstances.
- The role is largely **ceremonial in the executive domain**, except when acting as the President.
- The Vice President is **not a member of either House of Parliament**, despite presiding over the Rajya Sabha.

Importance of the Office

- The Vice President ensures **continuity in the executive during contingencies**, preventing any constitutional vacuum.
- The role strengthens the **functioning of the Rajya Sabha** by providing stable and impartial leadership.
- The office contributes to the **smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy and constitutional governance** in India.

Conclusion

The **Vice President of India** occupies a vital constitutional position by ensuring continuity in governance and maintaining legislative discipline as **Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**. Though the role is limited in executive authority, it becomes crucial **during presidential vacancies**. The office strengthens parliamentary democracy and upholds **constitutional stability**, acting as an essential pillar in India's political and institutional framework.

Constitutional Amendment Bills

Why in News: The Constitution **(131st Amendment) Bill, 2026** failed to pass in Parliament after not securing **the required special majority**, reigniting debates on federal consensus, political divisions, and limits of amendment power.

Key Details

- **Article 368 Framework:** Constitutional amendments follow a structured process ensuring **rigidity with flexibility** while safeguarding core principles.
- **Basic Structure Doctrine:** As held in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, Parliament cannot alter the Constitution's fundamental framework.
- **Federal Concerns:** Amendments affecting states require **ratification by at least half of State Legislatures**, reinforcing cooperative federalism.
- **Legislative Role of States:** State Assemblies act as **key stakeholders in federal amendments**, linking regional interests with national lawmaking.
- **Judicial Oversight:** The Supreme Court ensures **constitutional supremacy through judicial review**, preventing misuse of amendment powers.

Constitutional Amendment Bills: Meaning and Nature

- A Constitutional Amendment Bill is a **legislative proposal to modify, add, or repeal provisions of the Constitution of India** under the procedure laid down in Article 368 of the Indian Constitution.
- **Purpose:** These bills are introduced to **adapt the Constitution to changing political, social, and economic needs** of the country.
- **Supremacy of Constitution:** Amendments must respect the **basic structure of the Constitution**, which cannot be altered even by Parliament.
- **Flexibility with Rigidity:** The amendment process reflects a **balance between flexibility and rigidity**, allowing change but preventing misuse.

Types of Constitutional Amendments

- **Simple Majority Amendments:** Some provisions can be amended by a **simple majority of Parliament**, such as changes in citizenship or boundaries of states, and are not considered amendments under Article 368.
- **Special Majority Amendments:** Most amendments require a **special majority**, meaning a majority of total membership and two-thirds of members present and voting.
- **Special Majority with State Ratification:** Certain amendments affecting the **federal structure** require approval by at least **half of the state legislatures**.
- **Examples of Federal Matters:** These include changes related to the **election of the President, distribution of powers, or representation of states in Parliament**.

Procedure for Passing a Constitutional Amendment Bill

- **Introduction:** The bill can be introduced in **either House of Parliament (Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha)** and does not require prior permission of the President.
- **No Joint Sitting:** In case of disagreement between the two Houses, there is **no provision for a joint sitting**, making consensus essential.
- **Voting Requirement:** The bill must be passed in each House by a **special majority**, ensuring broad political support.
- **State Ratification (if required):** If the amendment affects federal provisions, it must be **ratified by at least half of the states**.

- **President's Assent:** After passage, the bill is sent to the President, who **must give assent**, making it a constitutional amendment.

Role of Parliament and States

- **Parliament's Authority:** Parliament has the **power to amend most parts of the Constitution**, reflecting parliamentary sovereignty within limits.
- **States' Participation:** States play a role in amendments affecting the **federal structure**, ensuring cooperative federalism.
- **No Role of State in Some Cases:** For many amendments, **state legislatures are not involved**, highlighting the central role of Parliament.
- **Balance of Power:** This system maintains a **balance between central authority and state autonomy**.

Limitations on Amendment Power

- **Basic Structure Doctrine:** The Supreme Court, in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, held that Parliament cannot alter the **basic structure** of the Constitution.
- **Judicial Review:** Amendments can be **reviewed by the judiciary** to ensure they do not violate fundamental principles.
- **Examples of Basic Features:** These include **democracy, rule of law, separation of powers, and federalism**.
- **Protection Against Misuse:** These limitations prevent **arbitrary or authoritarian changes** to the Constitution.

Significance of Constitutional Amendment Bills

- **Dynamic Constitution:** They ensure that the Constitution remains **relevant and adaptable over time**.
- **Socio-Economic Reforms:** Amendments enable the government to **implement reforms like reservation policies or GST**.
- **Strengthening Democracy:** They help in **improving governance and institutional efficiency**.
- **Legal Evolution:** They allow the Constitution to **evolve with judicial interpretations and societal changes**.

Key Examples of Constitutional Amendments

- **42nd Amendment Act:** Known as the "Mini-Constitution," it made **extensive changes to strengthen the central government**.
- **44th Amendment Act:** It restored **democratic features and curtailed emergency powers**.
- **101st Amendment Act:** It introduced the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**, transforming India's indirect tax system.
- **73rd Amendment Act:** It strengthened **local self-government in rural areas**.

Conclusion

Constitutional amendment processes and State Legislative Assemblies together reflect India's **balanced federal structure**, combining **democratic flexibility** with institutional safeguards. While **Parliament drives constitutional change**, states ensure inclusiveness and **federal legitimacy**. Judicial review further protects core values. Ongoing debates underline the need to preserve constitutional morality, **maintain Centre-**

State harmony, and ensure amendments serve long-term democratic stability rather than short-term political objectives.

Anti-Defection Law

Why in News: The Anti-Defection Law is in news due to recent political defections, delayed Speaker decisions, and court interventions, raising concerns over misuse, weakening democracy, and need for institutional reforms.

Key Details

- **Introduced via** 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985, adding the **Tenth Schedule** to the Constitution of India.
- **Disqualification grounds:** defying party whip, voluntarily leaving party, or joining another party.
- **Decision authority:** Speaker/Chairman acts as **quasi-judicial authority**, subject to judicial review.
- **Exception:** Allowed in case of **two-thirds party merger** (split provision removed by 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003).
- **Major issue:** delays, bias, and reduced **legislative independence** leading to calls for reforms.

Background and Purpose

- The **Anti-Defection Law** was introduced to curb **political defections** motivated by personal gain.
- It aims to ensure **stability of elected governments** and uphold the **mandate of voters**.
- Enacted through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985.
- Inserted the **Tenth Schedule** into the Constitution of India.
- Strengthened further by the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003.

Grounds for Disqualification

- A legislator is disqualified if they **voluntarily give up party membership**.
- Voting or abstaining **against party directions (whip)** without permission leads to disqualification.
- Independent members lose their seat if they **join a political party after election**.
- Nominated members are disqualified if they **join a party after six months**.
- The law focuses on maintaining **party discipline in legislatures**.

Exceptions and Safeguards

- **Merger provision** allows defection if **two-thirds of members** of a party agree to merge with another party.
- Earlier provision of **one-third split** was removed by the 91st Amendment.
- Presiding officers (Speaker/Chairman) may **resign from party** without disqualification.
- Designed to balance **stability with limited flexibility** in political alignment.
- Prevents misuse while allowing **genuine political realignments**.

Role of Presiding Officer

- The **Speaker or Chairman** decides on questions of disqualification.
- Their decision is considered **final**, subject to judicial review.

- They act as a **quasi-judicial authority**.
- No strict **time limit** is prescribed for decision-making.
- This often leads to **delays and allegations of bias**.

Criticism and Challenges

- Weakens **freedom of speech and expression** of legislators.
- Promotes **party high command control** over elected representatives.
- Decisions by Speakers are sometimes seen as **politically influenced**.
- Lack of time-bound decisions allows **strategic delays**.
- Critics argue it undermines **true parliamentary debate and dissent**.

Significance and Way Forward

- Plays a key role in ensuring **political stability** in India.
- Prevents **“Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram”** style frequent defections.
- Needs reforms like **time-bound decisions** by presiding officers.
- Suggestion to shift decision-making power to an **independent tribunal**.
- Balancing **party discipline with democratic freedom** remains crucial.

Conclusion

The Anti-Defection Law **remains vital for ensuring political stability** and preventing opportunistic defections, but its effectiveness is undermined by delays, partisan decisions, and restricted **legislative freedom**. Reforms such as time-bound rulings and independent adjudication are necessary. A balanced approach is required to **protect both party discipline and democratic dissent** within India’s parliamentary framework.

Constitutional Morality & Judiciary

Why in News: The debate on **“constitutional morality” vs “societal morality”** has resurfaced in judicial discourse, particularly in cases like **Sabarimala and Navtej Singh Johar**, raising concerns about constitutional values and judicial functioning.

Key Details

- Constitutional morality is increasingly debated in **Supreme Court judgments and legal discourse**.
- It has been invoked in landmark cases such as **Sabarimala (2018)** and **Navtej Singh Johar (2018)**.
- Critics argue it is vague, while supporters see it as a **guiding constitutional principle**.
- The debate reflects concerns about **judicial overreach, arbitrariness, and weakening constitutional values**.

Constitutional Morality – Meaning & Origin

- **Concept by B.R. Ambedkar:** Constitutional morality refers to adherence to **constitutional values, procedures, and spirit**, not merely the text. Ambedkar emphasised it as essential for sustaining democracy in a diverse society.
- **Core Elements:** It includes **rule of law, respect for institutions, individual liberty, equality, and fraternity**, forming the ethical foundation of constitutional governance.

- **Not a Strict Legal Standard:** It is not a rigid judicial test but a **normative guiding principle**, shaping interpretation and ensuring decisions align with constitutional ideals.
- **Relevance in Democracy:** In a plural society like India, constitutional morality ensures **minority rights are protected against majoritarian pressures**.

Constitutional Morality vs Societal Morality

- **Constitutional Morality:** Based on **universal principles of justice, equality, and liberty**, it evolves through legal reasoning and constitutional interpretation.
- **Societal Morality:** Derived from **traditions, customs, and social norms**, which may sometimes be exclusionary or discriminatory.
- **Conflict in Practice:** In cases like **Sabarimala**, societal practices were challenged against constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.

Judicial Application & Key Case Laws

- **Sabarimala Case (2018):** The Supreme Court allowed entry of women of all ages, prioritising **gender equality over religious customs**.
- **Navtej Singh Johar Case (2018):** Decriminalisation of homosexuality upheld **individual dignity, privacy, and equality**, rejecting societal stigma.
- **Shayara Bano Case (Triple Talaq):** The Court invalidated instant triple talaq, reinforcing **gender justice and constitutional supremacy**.
- **Significance:** These cases show how constitutional morality helps courts **balance rights, traditions, and institutional autonomy**.

Criticism of Constitutional Morality

- **Vagueness & Indeterminacy:** Critics argue the term lacks precise definition, making it prone to **subjective judicial interpretation**.
- **Judicial Overreach:** Excessive reliance may lead courts to **override legislative intent**, raising concerns about separation of powers.
- **Conflict with Democracy:** Some view it as a **top-down imposition**, undermining societal consensus and democratic processes.

Challenges in Judicial Functioning

- **Perceived Arbitrariness:** Inconsistent reasoning and outcomes can weaken **predictability and credibility of the judiciary**.
- **Procedural Concerns:** Issues such as delays, selective hearings, and lack of transparency affect **rule of law and public trust**.
- **Recent Concerns:** Criticism over handling of issues like **voter disenfranchisement and institutional sensitivity** highlights judicial accountability concerns.
- **Impact:** Weakening of judicial discipline can erode **constitutional morality itself**, creating institutional imbalance.

Role of Constitutional Morality as a Diagnostic Tool

- **Evaluating State Actions:** It helps assess whether laws and policies align with **fundamental rights and constitutional values**.
- **Checking Arbitrary Power:** Acts as a safeguard against **abuse of authority by legislature, executive, or judiciary**.

- **Promoting Reasoned Decisions:** Encourages courts to base judgments on **logic, fairness, and constitutional principles**, not popular sentiment.
- **Strengthening Democracy:** It ensures governance remains **rights-based, inclusive, and accountable**.

Way Forward

- **Clear Judicial Standards:** Courts should develop **structured principles** for applying constitutional morality to reduce arbitrariness and enhance consistency.
- **Balance between Activism and Restraint:** Judiciary must maintain equilibrium between **protecting rights and respecting legislative domain**.
- **Strengthening Constitutional Culture:** Civic education, awareness, and institutional integrity are needed to promote **constitutional values in society**.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Transparency in judicial processes and adherence to procedural discipline can reinforce **public trust and legitimacy**.

Conclusion

Constitutional morality remains a vital guiding principle for Indian democracy. While it may not provide definitive answers, it directs institutions toward **justice, equality, and reasoned governance**. Republics thrive not merely on legal texts but on the **ethical commitment of institutions and citizens** to constitutional values. Safeguarding constitutional morality is essential to prevent arbitrariness and sustain India's democratic framework.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Constitutional morality primarily refers to:

- (a) Social customs and traditions
- (b) Adherence to constitutional values and principles
- (c) Parliamentary supremacy
- (d) Judicial supremacy

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. "Constitutional morality acts as a safeguard against majoritarianism in India." Discuss with examples. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Building a Resilient Health Sector in India

Why in News: A recent editorial in The Hindu Business Line highlighted the evolving challenges and opportunities in India's healthcare ecosystem, particularly focusing on rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs), digital health infrastructure, and the need for resilient public health systems.

Key Details

- A 2023 The Lancet study estimates that over **100 million Indians suffer from diabetes**, while nearly **130 million are pre-diabetic**.
- Public health expenditure in India remains around **2% of GDP**, below the National Health Policy target of **2.5% of GDP**.
- Under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, more than **80 crore ABHA IDs** have been created.
- Over **1.8 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs)** are operational across India focusing on preventive healthcare.

- The number of medical colleges increased from **387 in 2014** to over **810 by 2025**, significantly expanding healthcare human resources.

India's Healthcare Sector: Emerging Transformation

Demographic Dividend and Healthcare

- India possesses one of the world's youngest populations, making healthcare investment critical for converting demographic potential into productive human capital.
- A healthy workforce directly contributes to economic growth, labour productivity, and long-term social development.
- Rising urbanisation, lifestyle changes, and ageing populations are simultaneously increasing healthcare burdens.

Digital Health Ecosystem in India

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission aims to establish an interoperable digital healthcare ecosystem integrating patient records, healthcare providers, and hospitals digitally.

- Over **800 million Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts (ABHA)** have been generated.
- More than **4.85 lakh health facilities** are integrated into the digital health registry.
- The initiative reduces information asymmetry and improves continuity of care across fragmented healthcare systems.

Telemedicine and Digital Access

- Teleconsultation services through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs improve specialist access in rural and remote regions.
- As of October 2025, over **41 crore teleconsultations** had been conducted nationwide.
- Digital healthcare reduces travel costs, waiting time, and geographic healthcare disparities.

Preventive Healthcare and Primary Care

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs)

- India has shifted from selective healthcare delivery toward **comprehensive primary healthcare**.
- More than **1.8 lakh AAMs** are operational focusing on early disease detection and preventive healthcare.
- These centres are particularly important for tackling the rising burden of NCDs like diabetes and hypertension.

Screening and Early Detection

- Over **41.5 crore people** have been screened for hypertension.
- Around **41.3 crore people** have undergone diabetes screening.
- Early diagnosis reduces long-term treatment costs and prevents tertiary complications.

Financial Risk Protection in Healthcare

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana provides financial protection against catastrophic healthcare expenditure.

- The scheme covers nearly **12 crore vulnerable families** with annual insurance coverage of **₹5 lakh per household**.
- As of February 2026, over **11.69 crore hospital admissions** had been authorised under PM-JAY.
- The programme reduces out-of-pocket expenditure and improves healthcare affordability.

Growth of Indigenous MedTech and Pharma Sector

PLI Scheme and Bulk Drug Parks

- India is promoting self-reliance in pharmaceuticals and medical technology through Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes.
- Three bulk drug parks have been approved in:
 - Andhra Pradesh
 - Gujarat
 - Himachal Pradesh
- The medical devices PLI scheme generated over **₹12,000 crore sales** including exports worth **₹5,800 crore**.

BioE3 Policy and Biopharma SHAKTI

- The BioE3 Policy aims to expand India's bioeconomy to **\$300 billion by 2030**.
- The Union Budget 2026–27 announced the **Biopharma SHAKTI Initiative** with an outlay of **₹10,000 crore** over five years.
- The initiative seeks to position India as a global hub for biologics and biosimilar manufacturing.

Epidemiological Surveillance and Pandemic Preparedness

PM-ABHIM and Genome India

Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission strengthens India's public health infrastructure and disease surveillance systems.

- The scheme allocates nearly **₹64,000 crore** for integrated public health laboratories.
- GenomeIndia has completed sequencing of over **10,000 Indian genomes** to support genomic research and precision medicine.
- AI-driven surveillance systems improve pandemic preparedness and disease forecasting.

Expansion of Medical Human Resources

Medical Colleges and Nursing Infrastructure

- The number of medical colleges increased from **387 in 2014** to over **810 by 2025**.
- India is also establishing **157 new nursing colleges** to address shortages in allied healthcare personnel.
- Expanding healthcare education is essential for improving doctor-population and nurse-population ratios.

India's Global Health Diplomacy

Vaccine Leadership and Global South

- India supplies over **50% of global vaccine demand**, reinforcing its position as the "Pharmacy of the World."
- India hosts the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine promoting evidence-based AYUSH integration.
- Healthcare diplomacy strengthens India's strategic soft power and international cooperation.

Medical Value Travel and HEAL in India

Medical Tourism Potential

- India is emerging as a major destination for affordable and high-quality medical treatment.
- Between January and November 2025, over **4.5 lakh foreign medical tourists** visited India.
- The "HEAL in India" initiative integrates modern medicine with AYUSH-based holistic healthcare systems.

Key Challenges in India's Healthcare Ecosystem

Low Public Health Expenditure

- Public healthcare spending remains below the targeted **2.5% of GDP**.

- Insufficient funding constrains infrastructure expansion, workforce recruitment, and primary healthcare delivery.
- States continue to bear a large fiscal burden in healthcare financing.

High Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)

- Out-of-pocket expenditure still accounts for nearly **39% of India's total health expenditure**.
- Medical emergencies continue to push millions of families into poverty annually.
- Catastrophic health expenses undermine socioeconomic stability.

Rural-Urban Healthcare Divide

- Nearly **73% of hospital beds are concentrated in urban areas**, while around **69% of India's population lives in rural regions**.
- Rural healthcare centres continue to face severe shortages of doctors, nurses, and specialists.
- Geographical disparities restrict equitable healthcare access.

Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

- India faces a rapid epidemiological transition toward diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases.
- NCD-related productivity losses are projected to significantly impact India's economic growth by 2030.
- The existing healthcare system remains heavily treatment-oriented rather than prevention-oriented.

One Health Approach and Zoonotic Diseases

One Health Concept

- The **One Health Approach** recognises the interconnectedness between:
 - Human Health
 - Animal Health
 - Environmental Health
- It promotes coordinated action across healthcare, veterinary science, ecology, and environmental governance.
- The approach gained global importance after outbreaks like COVID-19, Ebola, and Nipah virus.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

- Excessive use of antibiotics in healthcare and livestock sectors has accelerated Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).
- India's National Action Plan on AMR seeks to regulate antibiotic usage and strengthen surveillance systems.
- AMR threatens to create a "post-antibiotic era" where routine infections become untreatable.

Way Forward

- **Increase Public Health Spending:** Achieve the National Health Policy target of 2.5% of GDP expenditure on healthcare.
- **Strengthen Preventive Healthcare:** Expand early screening, nutrition programmes, and lifestyle awareness campaigns.
- **Bridge Rural-Urban Gaps:** Improve healthcare infrastructure and specialist availability in rural regions.
- **Promote One Health Governance:** Integrate human, animal, and environmental health surveillance systems.
- **Enhance Digital Health Literacy:** Improve accessibility and awareness regarding digital health platforms.

- **Boost Indigenous MedTech:** Strengthen domestic manufacturing of APIs, diagnostics, and medical devices.

Conclusion

India's healthcare sector is undergoing a major structural transformation driven by digital innovation, preventive healthcare expansion, and indigenous pharmaceutical growth. However, persistent challenges such as low public spending, rural-urban disparities, rising NCD burden, and healthcare workforce shortages continue to limit universal healthcare access.

A resilient, inclusive, and preventive healthcare ecosystem rooted in the **One Health Approach** will be critical for securing India's demographic dividend and achieving the vision of a developed India by 2047.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):

1. It aims to create a national digital health ecosystem.
2. It provides ₹5 lakh insurance cover to all citizens.
3. It includes creation of Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts (ABHA).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the major challenges facing India's healthcare ecosystem. How can the "One Health Approach" contribute towards building a resilient public health system in India? (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Finance commission

Why in News: Debates on Centre-State fiscal relations and resource sharing, along with discussions on recommendations of recent Finance Commissions, have brought renewed attention to the role of the Finance Commission.

Key Details

- Finance Commission recommendations are **advisory but generally accepted** by the government
- It submits its report to the **President, who lays it before Parliament**
- Plays a role in **disaster management funding** through dedicated funds
- Encourages **fiscal discipline and accountability** among States
- Uses evolving criteria like **demographics and performance indicators** in allocations

Finance Commission of India – Overview

- The **Finance Commission of India** is a **constitutional body** established under **Article 280** of the Indian Constitution.
- It is constituted by the **President of India** every **five years** or earlier if needed.
- Its primary role is to ensure **fair distribution of financial resources** between the Centre and States.
- It acts as a **neutral arbiter** in Centre-State fiscal relations.

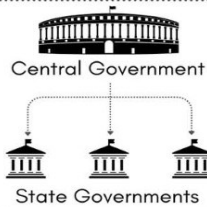
FINANCE COMMISSION OF INDIA

The Government of India has established the 16th Finance Commission (Chairman- Dr. Arvind Panagariya)

Finance Commission is a constitutional body under

ARTICLE 280

that recommends the **distribution of tax revenues** between the Central government and the States.



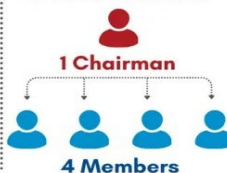
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FINANCE COMMISSION INDIA
suggestions made by Finance Commission.



CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMISSION



STRUCTURE

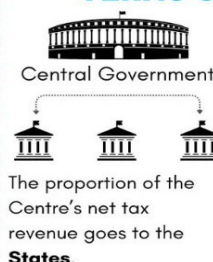


QUALIFICATIONS

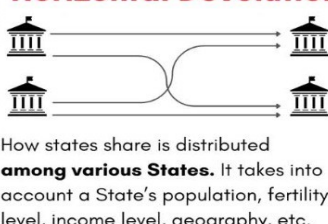
FINANCE COMMISSION (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT, 1951 specifies the qualifications for the Chairman and other members.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION

Vertical Devolution



Horizontal Devolution



Recommends

Principles for **grants-in-aid** from the Consolidated Fund and **Article 275**.

Measures to boost state funds for **panchayats** and **municipalities**.

Reviews and suggests improvements for **disaster financing** under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.

ISSUES

<p>The FC, appointed by the Centre, may be influenced by political factors.</p>	<p>States claim that Centre often doesn't share funds as recommended by the Commission.</p>	<p>Cess and surcharge, about 23% of gross tax receipts, are not shared with States.</p>	<p>The share of taxes for southern States has decreased over the last six Finance Commissions.</p>	<p>Industrialized states get less from the Centre than they contribute.</p>	<p>Disagreements persist over tax sharing between the Centre and States.</p>
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Mismatch between **revenue powers** and **expenditure** duties leads to state dependence on Union transfers.



VERTICAL FISCAL IMBALANCE

Importance of Reducing VFI

- Increases public spending efficiency by granting states **more autonomy**.
- Helps address imbalances during crises.
- Promotes a **more equitable federal structure**.

Role of Finance Commission

- Increase tax devolution to 49%.
- Address **cesses** and **surcharges** reducing the divisible pool.

Composition

- Consists of a **Chairman + four other members**.
- Members are appointed by the **President**.
- Qualifications are determined by **Parliament**.
- Experts usually include those with knowledge of **public finance, economics, and administration**.

Functions

- Recommends **distribution of taxes** between Centre and States (**vertical devolution**).
- Suggests **allocation** among States (**horizontal devolution**).
- Recommends **grants-in-aid** to States from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Advises on measures to **augment State finances**, especially for **Panchayats and Municipalities**.
- Can address **any other matter** referred by the President.

Types of Devolution

- Vertical Devolution** → Sharing of revenue between **Centre** and **States**.

- Horizontal Devolution** → Distribution of States' share among **different States**.
- Criteria include **population, income distance, area, forest cover, tax effort**, etc.

Significance

- Promotes **fiscal federalism** in India.
- Ensures **equity and balanced regional development**.
- Helps reduce **inter-state disparities**.
- Enhances **financial stability of States**.
- Strengthens **cooperative federalism**.

Trends (Example: 15th Finance Commission)

- Chaired by **N. K. Singh**.
- Recommended **41% tax devolution** to States.
- Emphasised **performance-based incentives**.
- Focused on sectors like **health, defence, and disaster management**.

Challenges

- Rising **demands from States** vs limited resources.
- Concerns over **conditional grants** affecting autonomy.

- Balancing **equity vs efficiency** in allocation.
- Increasing role overlap with bodies like **NITI Aayog**.

Conclusion

The **Finance Commission** continues to play a crucial role in maintaining fiscal balance in India's federal structure. By adapting its criteria and addressing emerging challenges, it ensures **equitable and efficient resource distribution**. Strengthening its independence, improving data transparency, and aligning with cooperative **federalism principles** will enhance its relevance in managing evolving economic demands and intergovernmental fiscal relations effectively.

NITI Aayog

Why in News: NITI Aayog and Foundation for Economic Development released a report highlighting India's low global share (0.5%) in sports equipment exports despite strong potential, pointing to structural bottlenecks.

Key Details

- Introduced the concept of **Three-Year Action Agenda**, replacing Five-Year Plans
- Plays a role in **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)** policy formulation
- Acts as a **platform for resolving inter-sectoral and inter-departmental issues**
- Supports **capacity building and governance reforms** in states
- Engages with **international organizations and global think tanks**

Introduction to NITI Aayog

- Established in **2015**, replacing the **Planning Commission**
- Functions as the **policy think tank** of the Government of India
- Aims to promote **cooperative federalism**
- Focuses on **sustainable and inclusive development**
- Provides **strategic and technical advice** to the government

Objectives of NITI Aayog

- Promote **cooperative and competitive federalism**
- Foster **innovation and entrepreneurship**
- Ensure **inclusive growth** across regions
- Encourage **bottom-up planning**
- Support **evidence-based policymaking**

Composition

- **Chairperson:** Prime Minister of India
- **Vice-Chairperson:** Appointed by the PM
- **Governing Council:** Chief Ministers of all States and UTs
- **Regional Councils:** Formed for specific issues
- Includes **experts and specialists** in various fields

Key Functions

- Formulate **long-term policy frameworks**

- Act as a **knowledge hub** for best practices
- Monitor and evaluate **government schemes**
- Facilitate **inter-state coordination**
- Promote **innovation through initiatives**

Major Initiatives

- **Aspirational Districts Programme** – development of backward districts
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)** – promotes innovation ecosystem
- **National SDG Index** – tracks Sustainable Development Goals
- **India Innovation Index** – ranks states on innovation
- **School Education Quality Index (SEQI)**

Significance

- Replaced **centralized planning** with **dynamic policy-making**
- Strengthens **Centre-State relations**
- Encourages **data-driven governance**
- Promotes **healthy competition among states**
- Aligns policies with **global development goals**

Challenges

- Lacks **statutory/constitutional status**
- Limited **financial powers** compared to Planning Commission
- Implementation depends on **state cooperation**
- Coordination issues across diverse regions
- Measuring outcomes effectively remains complex

Conclusion

India's sports equipment manufacturing sector holds significant untapped potential despite strong **cultural engagement** with sports. Structural bottlenecks such as fragmented production, limited technology adoption, and inadequate global integration **hinder growth**. With targeted policy support, improved infrastructure, and **export-oriented strategies**, India can enhance its global share. Strengthening this sector will **boost employment**, promote economic growth, and position India as a competitive player globally.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following best describes the role of NITI Aayog?

- Constitutional body for financial distribution
- Policy think tank of Government of India
- Regulatory authority for industries
- Judicial advisory body

Answer: b

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Rebuilding ties

Why in News: India has revived diplomatic talks with Turkey and Azerbaijan after prolonged tensions post-2025 conflict, marking a **strategic shift towards** pragmatic engagement despite earlier hostility and geopolitical differences.

Key Details

- **New Delhi** resumes diplomatic engagement with **Turkey** and **Azerbaijan** after a year of tensions
- Fallout began after **Operation Sindoor** and reactions to the **Pahalgam terror attack**
- India perceived both countries as **aligned with Pakistan**, worsening trust deficit
- Economic ties declined due to **boycotts, reduced tourism, and trade disruptions**
- Recent diplomatic outreach signals **shift towards pragmatic foreign policy**

Policy Shift in Diplomacy

- **New Delhi** has recently resumed diplomatic engagement with **Turkey** and **Azerbaijan**
- This marks a **significant shift** from the earlier confrontational stance
- Change comes after nearly a year of strained relations
- Indicates a move towards **recalibration of foreign policy priorities**
- Suggests willingness to **rebuild dialogue despite past tensions**

Background: Conflict and Diplomatic Fallout

- Tensions escalated after the **India-Pakistan conflict** and **Operation Sindoor** (May 2025)
- India expressed anger not only at **Pakistan** but also its perceived supporters
- Statements from Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Malaysia criticized India's strikes after **Pahalgam terror attack**
- India excluded diplomats of unsupportive countries during briefings
- Relations deteriorated sharply at diplomatic and public levels

Strategic and Military Concerns

- India perceived **Turkey** as an indirect adversary during the conflict
- **Azerbaijan** was believed to have provided **technological support** to Pakistan
- Military briefings highlighted **multiple adversaries** along the border
- Concerns extended beyond direct conflict to **geopolitical alignments**
- Trust deficit deepened due to perceived external involvement

Economic and Diplomatic Consequences

- Trade and tourism with Turkey and Azerbaijan **declined significantly**

- Social media campaigns promoted **boycotts** of both countries
- India avoided routing evacuations via these nations during the **Iran crisis (June 2025)**
- Alternative routes like **Armenia and Turkmenistan** were preferred
- Talks emerged of a counter-grouping: India–Armenia–Greece vs Pakistan–Turkey–Azerbaijan

Renewed Engagement and Pragmatic Approach

- India resumed talks by sending diplomats and hosting officials
- Both sides now see **mutual benefit in restoring ties**
- Highlights need for **pragmatic diplomacy over emotional reactions**
- India should avoid falling into rigid geopolitical “camps”
- Emphasizes maintaining **strategic autonomy** while managing adversarial relations

Conclusion

India's renewed engagement reflects a pragmatic recalibration of foreign policy in a volatile global environment. Moving beyond **emotional responses**, New Delhi seeks to **balance strategic interests** while maintaining autonomy. Constructive dialogue with **adversarial nations** can reduce tensions, restore economic ties, and enhance regional stability, reinforcing India's tradition of independent and **balanced diplomacy** without aligning into rigid geopolitical blocs.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. “India's foreign policy must balance strategic autonomy with pragmatic engagement.” Discuss in the context of India's recent diplomatic outreach to Turkey and Azerbaijan. (150 words, 10 marks)

India–South Korea ties

Why in News: Visit of Lee Jae **Myung to Delhi boosted India–South Korea** ties through trade, technology partnerships, and **strategic cooperation** amid global geopolitical and economic uncertainties.

Key Details

- **Strategic Partnership Upgrade:** India and South Korea launched a **Special Strategic Partnership vision** focusing on future-oriented cooperation.
- **Trade Target Expansion:** Both countries aim to increase **bilateral trade to \$50 billion** by the end of the decade.
- **Technology Collaboration:** Focus on **critical minerals, quantum computing, and manufacturing**, combining Korean technology with India's scale.
- **Untapped Potential:** Current trade (~\$27 billion) and **low people-to-people exchanges** remain below potential despite strong cultural links.

- **Geopolitical Context:** Shared concerns over **Indo-Pacific stability, energy security, and global disruptions** are driving closer engagement.

Visit and Strategic Significance

- The visit of Lee Jae Myung to India, including meetings with Narendra Modi, focused on strengthening **trade and technology cooperation**.
- It marked the **first such visit in eight years**, making it a long-awaited diplomatic engagement.
- The discussions aimed at building **future-oriented ties** amid ongoing **global uncertainties**.

Key Agreements and Economic Goals

- Both nations committed to increasing **bilateral trade to \$50 billion** by the end of the decade.
- A **joint vision statement** for the *India–Republic of Korea Special Strategic Partnership* was launched.
- Agreements included **shipbuilding, maritime logistics, energy security, and sustainability**.
- Around **15 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** were signed across multiple economic sectors.

Technology and Industrial Collaboration

- The partnership aims to combine **Korean technological expertise** with **India’s large-scale manufacturing capacity**.
- Focus areas include **critical minerals** and **quantum computing**, alongside existing strengths in **heavy industries and consumer goods**.
- Several **South Korean companies** have established a strong presence, making India a key **production hub**.

Cultural Links and Underperformance

- Historical ties trace back to Heo Hwang-ok, symbolising **ancient connections**.
- Despite cultural exchanges like **K-pop and Korean dramas** gaining popularity in India, and Indian influence in Korea, **people-to-people ties remain limited**.
- **Trade levels (~\$27 billion)** remain low for two major global economies.
- Tourist flows and expatriate populations are **significantly below potential**.

Challenges and Future Roadmap

- Strengthening ties requires deeper **political, strategic, and Indo-Pacific cooperation**.
- The long-pending **CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement)** needs to be expedited.
- Both nations share concerns over **global conflicts**, including the U.S.-Israel war with Iran, and their impact on **trade and energy security**.
- The visit provided an opportunity to develop a **shared strategy to navigate global disruptions** and reinforce **common democratic and economic values**.

Conclusion

India–South Korea relations are at a critical juncture, with significant untapped potential despite shared **democratic values and economic complementarities**. Strengthening ties will require **deeper trade integration**, faster agreement on CEPA, and enhanced **people-to-people** exchanges. In an era of global uncertainty, a robust partnership can ensure mutual

economic resilience, technological advancement, and strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. “India–South Korea relations have remained below potential despite strong complementarities.” Analyse the challenges and suggest measures to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific context. (250 words, 15 marks)

Chabahar Port and its significance

Why in News: Chabahar Port due to India’s long-term operational deal, renewed geopolitical relevance amid sanctions, and its role in strengthening alternative trade routes bypassing Pakistan.

Key Details

- **Long-term lease** gives India operational control for **10 years**, marking deeper strategic commitment
- **Sanctions waiver ambiguity** persists, creating uncertainty for investors and logistics companies
- **Private sector hesitancy** due to financial and insurance risks linked to Iran
- **Integration with INSTC remains partial**, limiting full trade potential currently
- **Focus on humanitarian trade**, especially supplies to Afghanistan through Chabahar
- **Emerging competition from new corridors** like IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor)

Location & Strategic Significance

- Located in **southeastern Iran** on the Gulf of Oman
- Only Iranian port with **direct access to the Indian Ocean**
- Bypasses **Pakistan**, giving India alternative access to Afghanistan & Central Asia
- Acts as a counterbalance to China’s Gwadar Port

India’s Role

- Developed under agreement between India and Iran
- Operated by India Ports Global Limited
- India invested in **port terminals, cranes, and infrastructure**
- Linked to India’s “**Connect Central Asia**” policy

Connectivity & Trade Potential

- Connected to Afghanistan via **Chabahar–Zahedan–Zaranj corridor**
- Integrates with International North-South Transport Corridor
- Reduces **time and cost of trade** with Central Asia & Europe
- Enables export of **Indian goods without transit restrictions from Pakistan**

Economic & Regional Importance

- Boosts **regional trade and energy routes**
- Helps Afghanistan reduce dependence on Pakistan’s ports
- Promotes development in Iran’s **Sistan-Baluchestan region**
- Potential hub for **multimodal transport (sea–road–rail)**

Challenges & Concerns

- Impact of **US sanctions on Iran** affects funding and operations
- Delays in **rail connectivity (Chabahar–Zahedan line)**
- Competition from China-backed Gwadar Port
- Political instability in the region

Recent Developments

- India signed a **long-term agreement (2024)** for port operation
- Increased focus on **INSTC integration** amid global supply chain shifts
- Growing importance due to **geopolitical tensions and trade diversification**

Way Forward

- Strengthen **infrastructure and rail links**
- Ensure **diplomatic balancing** amid sanctions
- Enhance **regional partnerships (Central Asia, Russia)**
- Position Chabahar as a **key trade gateway for Eurasia**

Conclusion

Chabahar Port remains a critical pillar of India's **regional connectivity strategy**, offering strategic autonomy and access to Eurasian markets. However, its success depends on resolving sanctions-related uncertainties, **accelerating infrastructure development**, and aligning with emerging **global trade corridors**. Sustained diplomatic engagement with Iran and other stakeholders will be essential to fully realise its **economic and geopolitical potential** in a rapidly shifting global order.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Chabahar Port?

1. It provides India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.
2. It is located on the Persian Gulf.
3. It is being developed with significant involvement of India.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: c

UAE Exit from OPEC

Why in News: The United Arab Emirates has announced its exit from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, raising concerns about global oil price stability and implications for major importers like India.

Key Details

- The UAE has exited OPEC after years of disagreement over production quotas led by Saudi Arabia. This reflects a shift towards maximising its own oil production and market share.
- OPEC's ability to control global oil supply and prices may weaken due to the exit of a key member. This could reduce the cartel's influence in stabilising oil markets.

- The UAE aims to increase oil production despite lower prices in the global market. This indicates a strategic shift from collective control to individual economic gains.
- For India, lower oil prices can reduce the import bill and improve macroeconomic stability. India imports nearly 85–90% of its crude oil needs, making it sensitive to price fluctuations.

OPEC: Formation and Role

- **Origin:** OPEC was established in 1960 by countries like Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela. It aimed to counter the dominance of Western oil companies over pricing and production.
- **Objective:** The organisation manages oil supply to influence global prices. It uses production quotas to prevent price crashes or excessive spikes.
- **OPEC+ Alliance:** It includes non-OPEC countries like Russia to strengthen market control. This expanded grouping plays a key role in global energy geopolitics.
- **Declining Influence:** OPEC's share in global oil production has declined over time. Non-OPEC producers, especially the US shale industry, now dominate supply.

Reasons Behind UAE's Exit

- **Production Constraints:** OPEC quotas restricted UAE from utilising its full production capacity. This created economic dissatisfaction as the country wanted to maximise output.
- **Low-Cost Advantage:** UAE has some of the lowest oil extraction costs globally. This allows it to remain profitable even at lower oil prices.
- **Market Share Strategy:** With global oil demand expected to peak in coming decades, UAE wants to monetise reserves quickly. It prefers expanding production rather than limiting output under cartel rules.
- **Geopolitical Differences:** Differences with Saudi Arabia and changing regional dynamics influenced the decision. This reflects evolving priorities within Gulf countries.

Global Oil Market Dynamics

- **Supply Management:** Oil prices are influenced by global supply and demand balance. OPEC traditionally controlled supply to stabilise prices.
- **Price Volatility:** Reduced coordination among producers can lead to price fluctuations. Increased supply may push prices downward in the long run.
- **Role of Chokepoints:** The Strait of Hormuz is critical for global oil transport. Any disruption here can significantly affect supply and prices.
- **Energy Transition:** Shift towards renewable energy is reducing long-term oil demand growth. This is influencing production strategies of oil-exporting countries.

Short-Term vs Long-Term Impact

- **Short-Term Stability:** Immediate impact on oil prices is limited due to ongoing geopolitical tensions. Supply disruptions currently play a bigger role than production decisions.
- **Long-Term Pressure:** Increased production by UAE may lead to oversupply in the future. This can result in sustained downward pressure on oil prices.
- **Potential Price War:** Other producers may increase output to maintain market share. This could lead to competitive pricing and volatility in markets.
- **Market Uncertainty:** Lack of coordinated action may increase unpredictability in global oil markets. This creates challenges for both producers and consumers.

Impact on India

- **Lower Import Bill:** Falling oil prices reduce India's expenditure on crude imports. A \$1 fall in oil prices can significantly lower the annual import bill.
- **Inflation Control:** Cheaper oil helps reduce inflation by lowering fuel and transport costs. This has positive effects on overall economic stability.
- **Energy Security:** Diversified supply and lower prices improve India's energy security. It reduces vulnerability to geopolitical shocks.
- **Economic Growth:** Lower energy costs support industrial growth and fiscal stability. This strengthens India's macroeconomic fundamentals.

Geopolitical Implications

- **Shift in Gulf Politics:** UAE's exit signals changing power dynamics within OPEC and GCC countries. It reflects growing independence in decision-making.
- **US Factor:** The move aligns partly with US interests in keeping oil prices moderate. This may strengthen strategic ties between UAE and Western nations.
- **OPEC Cohesion:** The exit may encourage other members to reconsider their participation. This could weaken the organisation's unity over time.
- **Russia-Saudi Role:** Future of OPEC+ depends heavily on coordination between major producers. Their decisions will shape global oil markets.

Challenges Ahead

- **Market Instability:** Reduced coordination among producers can increase volatility. This affects global economic stability.
- **Revenue Loss for Exporters:** Lower prices may hurt oil-dependent economies. Countries heavily reliant on oil revenue may face fiscal stress.
- **Transition Uncertainty:** Shift towards renewable energy adds uncertainty to long-term oil demand. This complicates investment and production decisions.
- **Strategic Competition:** Countries may prioritise national interests over collective stability. This can weaken global energy governance.

Way Forward

- **Balanced Production Strategy:** Countries should avoid extreme production increases. This will help maintain price stability in global markets.
- **Strengthening Cooperation:** Dialogue among producers is essential for market stability. Even outside OPEC, coordination can reduce volatility.
- **Energy Diversification:** Importing countries like India should invest in renewables. This reduces dependence on volatile oil markets.
- **Strategic Reserves:** Building oil reserves can help manage short-term shocks. It enhances resilience against supply disruptions.

Conclusion

The UAE's exit from OPEC marks a significant shift in global energy geopolitics. While it may weaken cartel control and lower oil prices in the long run, it also introduces uncertainty in global markets. For India, the development presents an opportunity to strengthen energy security and economic stability.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to OPEC and global oil markets, consider the following statements:

1. OPEC controls more than 70% of global oil production.

2. The UAE exited OPEC to increase its oil production capacity.
3. Lower global oil prices are beneficial for oil-importing countries like India.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

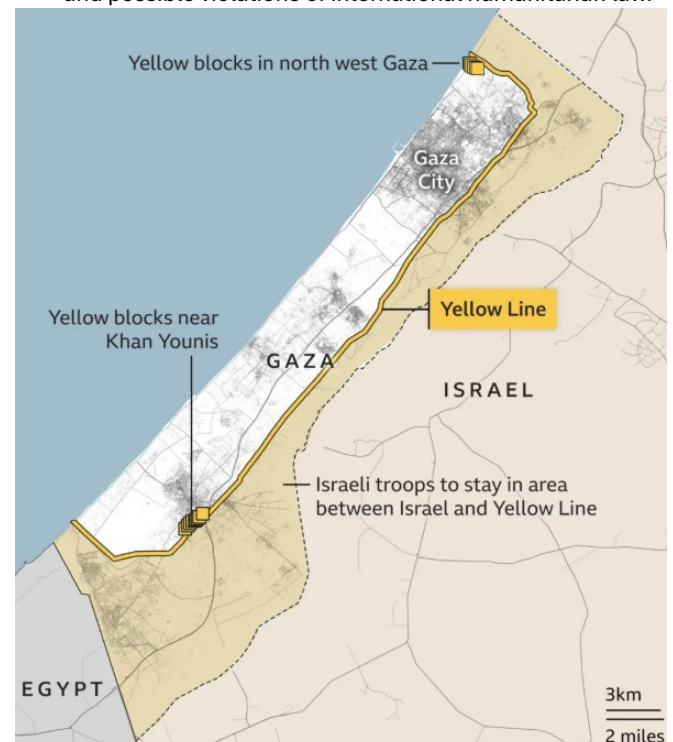
Answer: b (2 and 3 only)

The 'Yellow Line' Security Strategy

Why in News: Israel has expanded its "Yellow Line" security strategy from the Gaza Strip to southern Lebanon following the April 2026 ceasefire with Hezbollah. The strategy establishes a militarised buffer zone extending up to the **Litani River**, signalling a major shift in Israel's regional security doctrine.

Key Details

- The **Yellow Line** is a fortified military buffer zone established by the Israel Defense Forces inside hostile territory.
- It was first introduced during the **Gaza conflict of October 2025** and later expanded into southern Lebanon in 2026.
- The strategy aims to prevent militant groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah from rebuilding operational capacity near Israeli borders.
- The buffer zone reportedly extends up to the **Litani River** in Lebanon.
- International organisations and human rights groups have raised concerns regarding displacement, militarisation, and possible violations of international humanitarian law.



Yellow Line Strategy – Meaning & Concept

- **Meaning of Yellow Line:** The Yellow Line is a military demarcation created by Israel to establish a controlled buffer zone inside conflict regions for strategic security purposes.
- **Forward Defence Doctrine:** Unlike traditional borders, the Yellow Line reflects a "forward defensive posture" where threats are neutralised inside neighbouring territories before reaching Israeli borders.

- **Operational Control Mechanism:** The area under the Yellow Line is treated as a heavily militarised security zone with strict restrictions on civilian movement and infrastructure activities.
- **Shift in Military Doctrine:** The strategy represents Israel's transition from temporary military operations toward permanent territorial security control.

Historical Context of Israel's Security Boundaries

Green Line & Previous Security Models

- The Yellow Line draws conceptual parallels with earlier Israeli security boundaries such as the **1967 Green Line** and West Bank demarcations.
- However, unlike political boundaries, the Yellow Line functions primarily as a military control mechanism inside contested territories.

Gaza Conflict of 2025

- The strategy emerged during the Gaza war after the October 2025 escalation involving Hamas attacks on Israel.
- It was reportedly linked with security proposals under the peace framework associated with Donald Trump.

Features of the Yellow Line Strategy

Static Defensive Infrastructure

- The Yellow Line is characterised by permanent military infrastructure including fortified outposts, communication towers, barriers, and elevated earth mounds.
- This marks a doctrinal shift from mobile warfare toward static territorial defence.

Militarised Buffer Zone

- Areas east of the Yellow Line are treated as "closed military zones" or "free-fire zones" under Israeli military control.
- Civilian access and economic activities are heavily restricted within these zones.

Deep Territorial Penetration

- The strategy establishes Israeli military presence deep inside neighbouring territories rather than only along recognised borders.
- In Gaza, reports suggest nearly **58% of the territory** came under direct Israeli military control.

Physical Demarcation

- The Yellow Line is reportedly marked through yellow-painted barriers, concrete bollards, and visible security installations.
- The physical marking symbolises long-term military presence and territorial separation.

Expansion into Southern Lebanon

Lebanon Front

- Following the April 2026 ceasefire, Israel expanded the Yellow Line strategy into southern Lebanon against Hezbollah.
- The buffer zone reportedly stretches up to the **Litani River**, a strategically important geographic feature in southern Lebanon.

Objective in Lebanon

- The strategy seeks to prevent Hezbollah from re-establishing missile and militant infrastructure near Israeli territory.
- It also aims to create strategic depth against future cross-border attacks.

Strategic Significance of the Yellow Line

Preventive Security Doctrine

- The strategy reflects Israel's emphasis on pre-emptive and preventive security operations.
- It seeks to neutralise threats before they can directly target Israeli civilian populations.

Military Dominance

- The Yellow Line demonstrates a shift toward permanent military control and strategic territorial dominance in conflict zones.

- It enables rapid response capability and enhanced surveillance over hostile regions.

Regional Security Transformation

- The expansion into Lebanon indicates a broader transformation in Levant security architecture and conflict management.
- It may redefine future patterns of warfare and border control in West Asia.

Humanitarian & Legal Concerns

Civilian Displacement

- Human rights organisations argue that the strategy contributes to forced displacement of civilian populations.
- Restrictions on civilian return and access to agricultural lands have intensified humanitarian concerns.

International Humanitarian Law

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has reportedly raised concerns regarding civilian casualties and military operations inside buffer zones.
- Critics argue that permanent militarised zones inside occupied territories may violate international humanitarian and occupation laws.

Ghettoisation Concerns

- Humanitarian agencies describe the Yellow Line as a mechanism that fragments and isolates civilian populations.
- Restricted access to urban centres, resources, and infrastructure may worsen humanitarian crises.

Internal Criticism within Israel

Strategic Vulnerability

- Some Israeli military experts argue that static defence positions may expose troops to guerrilla warfare, sniper attacks, and anti-tank missile strikes.
- Permanent deployments can create prolonged military vulnerability.

Historical Parallels

- Critics compare the strategy with Israel's earlier prolonged military presence in southern Lebanon, which became costly and politically controversial.
- There are concerns that static occupation-style deployments may trigger long-term attritional conflict.

Economic & Military Burden

- Maintaining the Yellow Line reportedly requires substantial troop deployment and logistical support.
- The Gaza sector alone reportedly requires deployment of multiple military divisions, placing strain on reserve forces and defence expenditure.

Implications for Regional Geopolitics

Escalation Risks

- The expansion of militarised buffer zones may intensify regional tensions and provoke retaliatory actions from militant groups.
- It could complicate ceasefire negotiations and long-term peace efforts in West Asia.

Impact on Peace Process

- Permanent military control zones may reduce prospects for political negotiations and territorial compromise.
- It may deepen distrust between Israel and neighbouring populations.

International Diplomatic Pressure

- The strategy is likely to attract greater scrutiny from the United Nations, human rights organisations, and global powers.
- It could influence future debates on occupation, sovereignty, and conflict resolution in international forums.

Way Forward

- **Promote Diplomatic Solutions:** Sustainable regional peace requires political dialogue alongside military security measures.
- **Balance Security and Humanitarian Concerns:** Security strategies must comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilian rights.
- **Strengthen Ceasefire Mechanisms:** International mediation and monitoring can reduce escalation risks in conflict zones.
- **Avoid Permanent Militarisation:** Long-term stability requires reducing militarised occupation-style arrangements and encouraging negotiated settlements.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Broader West Asian security cooperation is necessary to address cross-border militancy and instability.

Conclusion

The Yellow Line strategy reflects a major transformation in Israel’s security doctrine from temporary military operations toward deeper territorial defence and permanent buffer zones. While Israel views it as essential for national security after repeated militant attacks, critics warn of humanitarian consequences, legal controversies, and risks of prolonged conflict. The strategy’s expansion into Lebanon may significantly reshape the geopolitical and security landscape of the Levant in the coming years.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE
Prelims MCQ
Q. The “Yellow Line” strategy recently seen in news is associated with:

(a) Maritime boundary dispute in the South China Sea
 (b) Military buffer zones established by Israel
 (c) Demilitarised zone between North and South Korea
 (d) Border agreement between Russia and Ukraine

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question
 Q. Discuss the strategic significance and humanitarian implications of Israel’s “Yellow Line” security strategy in West Asia. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

India–Russia RELOS Pact

Why in News: India and Russia operationalised the **Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS)** after its signing in February 2025 and ratification by Russia, marking a major expansion in bilateral defence cooperation beyond the traditional buyer–seller framework.

Key Details

- The **Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS)** enables India and Russia to access each other’s military logistics facilities.
- The agreement allows deployment of up to **3,000 troops**, along with access for **five warships and ten aircraft** simultaneously.
- RELOS is valid for an initial period of **five years**, extendable with mutual consent.
- The pact provides logistics support including port access, repairs, maintenance, fuel, navigation, and air traffic assistance.
- The agreement strengthens India–Russia defence ties through joint exercises, training, and humanitarian assistance operations.

INDIA–RUSSIA RELOS PACT
 A MAJOR STEP TOWARDS DEEPER DEFENCE & OPERATIONAL COOPERATION

WHAT IS RELOS?
 The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) allows India and Russia to provide each other logistics support, base access and operational facilitation for their armed forces.

KEY PROVISIONS OF RELOS				
 UP TO 3,000 TROOPS Can be deployed in each other’s territory	 5 WARSHIPS Up to five warships can be stationed simultaneously	 10 AIRCRAFT Up to ten aircraft can be stationed simultaneously	 5+5 YEARS Valid for 5 years, extendable for another 5 years by mutual consent	COMPREHENSIVE LOGISTICS SUPPORT Port access, repair services and essential supplies for naval vessels Air traffic control, navigation assistance and maintenance facilities for aircraft Covers joint exercises, training and humanitarian assistance & disaster relief (HADR)

SCOPE OF THE AGREEMENT	STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint military exercises Training and capacity building Humanitarian assistance & disaster relief (HADR) Deployment of military formations Access to naval bases and airfields, including Arctic regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ENHANCED MILITARY LOGISTICS Facilitates long-duration deployments with assured logistics support and timely maintenance of Russian-origin equipment. ARCTIC ACCESS Grants India strategic access to Russian facilities in the Arctic region, an area of growing geopolitical and economic importance. OPERATIONAL READINESS Improves interoperability and strengthens ability for rapid deployment during missions and contingencies. STRATEGIC AUTONOMY Reduces dependence on third-party logistics and support, reinforcing India’s independent foreign policy in a polarized world.

RELOS Pact – Meaning & Scope

Meaning of RELOS

- The **Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS)** is a military logistics-sharing arrangement between India and Russia.
- It enables both countries' armed forces to access each other's military facilities for refuelling, repairs, replenishment, transportation, and operational support.

Objective of RELOS

- The agreement seeks to improve operational cooperation, interoperability, and military readiness between the two countries.
- It also enhances strategic mobility and supports long-duration deployments in critical regions.

Key Provisions of the RELOS Pact

Deployment of Military Personnel

- The agreement permits deployment of up to **3,000 troops** in each other's territory during exercises, operations, or agreed missions.
- This provision enhances military coordination and strengthens strategic trust between both nations.

Naval & Air Access

- RELOS allows simultaneous stationing of up to **five naval warships** and **ten military aircraft** in each other's facilities.
- It provides access to naval ports, airfields, maintenance infrastructure, and logistical support systems.

Logistics & Maintenance Support

- The pact includes refuelling, repair services, replenishment supplies, and technical maintenance support.
- It is particularly important for India because a large share of its military platforms are of Russian origin.

Joint Exercises & Training

- The agreement supports joint military exercises, personnel exchanges, and training programmes.
- It strengthens interoperability between the armed forces of both countries during combat and humanitarian missions.

Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR)

- RELOS also covers cooperation during humanitarian crises, disaster relief, and emergency evacuation operations.
- This improves rapid-response capabilities in regional emergencies and maritime disasters.

Strategic Significance of RELOS

Enhanced Military Logistics

- The agreement ensures uninterrupted logistical support during long-range military deployments and naval missions.
- It reduces operational delays and improves sustainment capabilities of military assets.

Arctic Access for India

- RELOS provides India strategic access to Russian facilities in the **Arctic region**, an area of growing geopolitical and economic importance.
- The Arctic holds major reserves of hydrocarbons, rare minerals, and emerging maritime trade routes due to melting polar ice.

Improved Operational Readiness

- The pact strengthens interoperability and coordination between Indian and Russian armed forces.
- It enhances rapid deployment capability during strategic contingencies and military operations.

Strategic Autonomy

- The agreement reduces dependence on third-party military logistics support and external powers.
- It aligns with India's policy of maintaining **strategic autonomy** in an increasingly polarised global order.

India–Russia Defence Relations

Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership

- India and Russia share a longstanding **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**.
- Defence cooperation remains one of the strongest pillars of bilateral relations.

Russian-Origin Defence Equipment

- Approximately **60–70%** of India's military equipment is of Russian or Soviet origin.
- Key platforms include the S-400 Triumph, T-90 Tank, and Su-30MKI.

Joint Development & Production

- The relationship has evolved from simple defence imports toward co-development and manufacturing.
- Examples include the BrahMos missile programme and AK-203 rifle manufacturing project.

Institutional Defence Framework

- Defence cooperation is guided by the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation.
- This institutional mechanism oversees defence procurement, technology transfer, and strategic cooperation.

Joint Military Exercises

- India and Russia regularly conduct the INDRA Exercise.
- The exercises improve operational coordination, combat readiness, and interoperability across services.

Importance of Logistics Agreements in Modern Warfare

Force Projection Capability

- Logistics agreements allow countries to sustain military operations far from domestic territory.
- They improve strategic reach, maritime presence, and rapid force deployment capabilities.

Reduced Operational Dependence

- Such agreements reduce dependence on foreign intermediaries and improve military self-reliance.
- They are crucial during emergencies, conflicts, and humanitarian operations.

Maritime Security

- Access to overseas ports strengthens naval operations, anti-piracy missions, and protection of sea lanes.
- It supports India's wider Indo-Pacific maritime strategy.

India's Other Logistics Agreements

Expanding Strategic Partnerships

India has signed similar logistics agreements with several countries, including:

- United States – LEMOA
- France
- Australia
- Japan
- Singapore

These agreements enhance India's global military mobility and strategic outreach.

Challenges & Concerns

Geopolitical Sensitivities

- Closer defence cooperation with Russia must be balanced against India's growing partnerships with Western countries.
- Ongoing Russia-West tensions create diplomatic complexities for India.

Dependence on Russian Equipment

- Heavy reliance on Russian military hardware creates supply-chain vulnerabilities, especially during sanctions or geopolitical crises.

- India is gradually diversifying defence imports to reduce strategic dependence.

Technology & Payment Issues

- Sanctions-related payment mechanisms and technology transfer restrictions may affect future defence cooperation.
- Maintaining uninterrupted defence supplies remains a challenge.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Indigenous Defence Manufacturing:** Expand domestic defence production under Atmanirbhar Bharat to reduce external dependence.
- **Enhance Joint Development:** Focus on co-development of advanced military technologies and defence innovation.
- **Balanced Foreign Policy:** Continue maintaining strategic autonomy by balancing relations with Russia and Western partners.
- **Expand Maritime Cooperation:** Use logistics agreements to strengthen India's presence in the Indo-Pacific and Arctic regions.
- **Improve Interoperability:** Increase frequency of joint exercises and operational coordination mechanisms.

Conclusion

The India–Russia RELOS pact represents a major evolution in bilateral defence ties from a traditional buyer–seller relationship toward deeper operational and strategic cooperation. By

improving logistics access, military readiness, and interoperability, the agreement strengthens India's strategic reach and reinforces its policy of strategic autonomy. In an increasingly multipolar and uncertain global order, RELOS enhances India's defence preparedness while preserving its independent foreign policy approach.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) recently seen in news is related to:

- (a) India's nuclear energy cooperation
- (b) Bilateral logistics and military support agreement
- (c) Free trade agreement in defence equipment
- (d) Joint cyber security initiative

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the strategic significance of the India–Russia RELOS Pact in the context of India's defence preparedness and strategic autonomy. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

ECONOMY & AGRICULTURE

At long last

Why in News: India's **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor** achieved first criticality, marking progress in **nuclear energy**, but delays, cost overruns, and regulatory concerns raise questions about efficiency and future policy direction.

Key Details

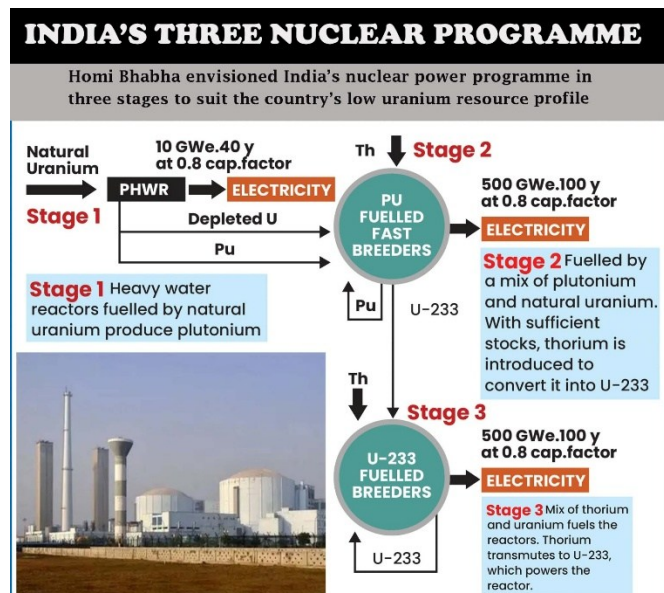
- PFBR achieved **first criticality**, marking entry into **second stage** of India's nuclear programme.
- Project faced **16-year delay** and cost escalation to over ₹8,000 crore.
- Uses **spent fuel and depleted uranium** to generate more plutonium.
- Nuclear power contributes only **~3% of India's electricity** currently.
- Offers advantages like **fuel efficiency, low land use, and energy security**.
- Raises concerns over **regulatory overlap, transparency, and economic viability**.

Achievement with Caution

- Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor attaining **first criticality** marks a major technological milestone for India
- However, the achievement is **qualified by long delays and cost overruns**
- It reflects both **scientific progress and governance shortcomings**

Delays and Cost Escalation Issues

- Total cost escalated to **₹8,181 crore**, over twice the approved budget
- The project is delayed by **around 16 years**, with key facilities still pending
- Reasons include **poor planning, procurement inefficiencies, and weak oversight**
- Political insulation reduced **accountability and timely corrections**



Strategic Role in Nuclear Programme

- PFBR is the **first commercial step in Stage-II** of India's three-stage nuclear programme
- It uses **reprocessed spent fuel and depleted uranium** to produce plutonium
- The long-term goal is to shift towards **thorium-based reactors in Stage-III**
- This strategy is based on India's **large thorium reserves**, ensuring future sustainability

Benefits and Emerging Concerns

- Nuclear energy provides **high fuel efficiency and lower land requirement** than solar
- It supports **energy security and reduced dependence on uranium imports**
- However, nuclear contributes only **~3% of total electricity generation**
- Falling costs of **renewables like solar and wind** challenge nuclear viability
- Economic efficiency must guide **future energy policy decisions**

Way Forward and Institutional Reforms

- Ensure **transparency, performance audits, and acceptance of operational flaws**
- Apply lessons from PFBR before expanding to **FBR1 and FBR2 reactors**
- Strengthen regulatory independence by separating **promotion and regulation roles**
- Reform oversight bodies like Atomic Energy Regulatory Board for better governance
- Align nuclear expansion with **cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and net-zero goals**

Conclusion

The PFBR milestone reflects progress in India's long-term nuclear strategy but also exposes inefficiencies in **planning, execution, and oversight**. Balancing nuclear energy's benefits with economic viability and renewable alternatives is essential. **Strengthening transparency, regulatory independence, and accountability** will be critical. Future expansion must be guided by performance, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability to ensure true energy security.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Discuss the significance of Fast Breeder Reactors in India's nuclear energy programme. Examine the challenges in their implementation and suggest reforms for a sustainable nuclear policy." (250 words, 15 marks)

Challenges for India's informal urban workforce

Why in News: Recent worker protests in Noida highlight rising urban precarity, declining bargaining power, and

informalisation, raising concerns about labour rights, living conditions, and sustainability of India’s urban development model.

Key Details

- **Informal dominance:** Nearly **90% workforce** in India is informal; urban areas show low regular salaried jobs (as per Periodic Labour Force Survey), increasing vulnerability.
- **Declining labour power:** Workers’ bargaining strength has weakened vis-à-vis **state institutions and employers**, especially in informal sectors lacking legal protections.
- **Urban transformation:** Cities shifted from **industrial production hubs** (e.g., mill closures in Mumbai and Ahmedabad) to centres of **survival-based economies**.
- **Policy shift:** The Washington Consensus led to reduced **rights-based services** and increased **privatisation and market-driven governance**.
- **Precarious living conditions:** High rents, slum concentration, debt dependence (noted in Reserve Bank of

IndiaBulletin 2025), and exposure to climate risks worsen urban inequality.

Rising Urban Worker Protests

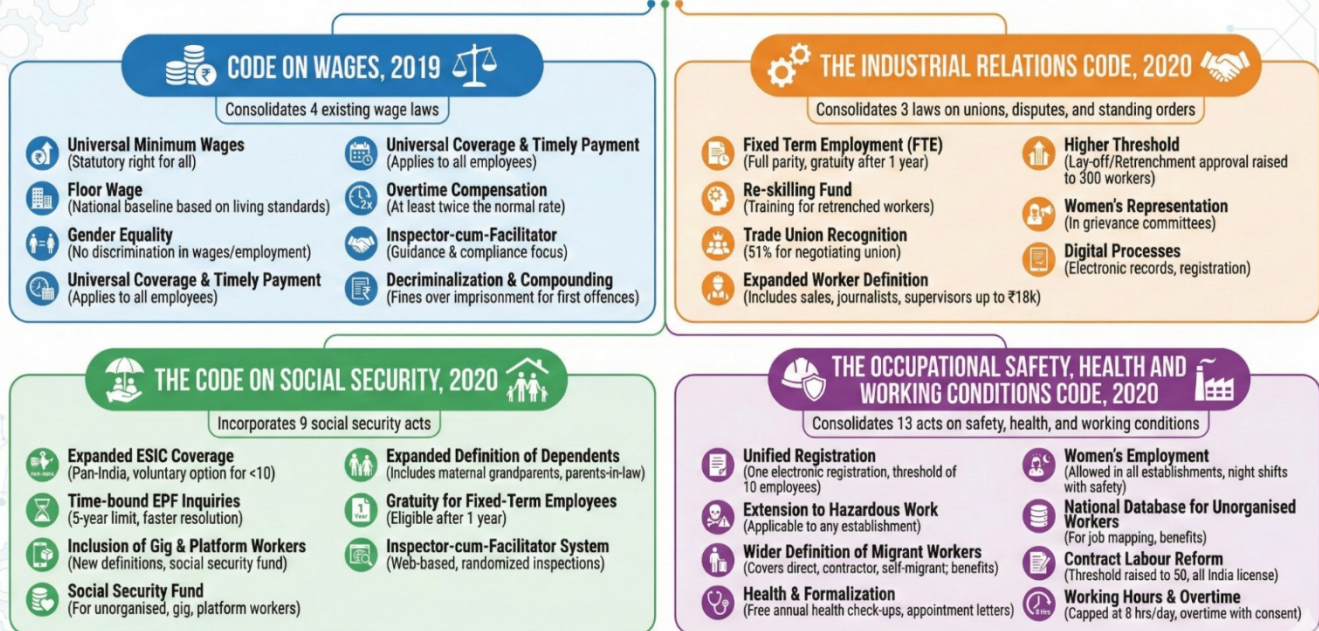
- Recent protests by workers in **Noida’s industrial units** highlight the deepening **insecurity in urban employment**.
- These demonstrations are not isolated events but indicate a **wider structural crisis** across Indian cities.
- Similar unrest may soon spread to **other urban centres** facing comparable conditions.

Declining Bargaining Power of Workers

- Over the decades, workers—especially in the **informal sector**—have seen a **steady erosion of bargaining strength**.
- Both the **state (municipal, State, Union)** and employers now dominate labour relations.
- This imbalance has reduced workers’ ability to **secure fair wages and protections**.

INDIA’S NEW LABOUR CODES (2019 & 2020): AMALGAMATION, SIMPLIFICATION, & REFORM

Aiming to strengthen workers’ rights, promote ease of doing business, and ensure social security and safety



Overall Goal: Balancing worker protection with business flexibility, promoting digitalization, and fostering a future-ready labour market

Dominance of Informal Employment

- Nearly **90% of India’s workforce** is employed in the **informal sector**.
- In urban areas, **regular salaried jobs remain limited**, as shown by PLFS data.
- A majority of workers survive in **unstable, unregulated, and low-security jobs**.

Transformation of Urban Economy

- Cities have shifted from **industrial production hubs** to centres focused on **basic survival and social reproduction**.
- Closure of mills and factories (e.g., Mumbai, Ahmedabad) weakened **organised labour systems**.
- Urban life now revolves around **meeting essential needs** like food, water, and childcare rather than stable employment.

Shift from Rights to Market-Based Services

- Under the influence of the **Washington Consensus** (coined by John Williamson), the state reduced its role in **rights-based welfare**.
- Focus shifted to **privatisation, fiscal discipline, and liberalisation**.
- Essential services like **health, education, and water** increasingly became **market-driven and fee-based**.

Urban Precarity and Policy Challenges

- Urban workers face a combination of **informal jobs, insecure housing, and high living costs**.
- Around **40% of the urban poor live in slums**, often spending **30–50% of income on rent**.
- Many settlements are located in **hazard-prone areas**, worsening vulnerability.

- Issues are intensified by **privatisation, eviction drives, weakened labour laws, and debt traps** due to reliance on informal credit.
- Initiatives like **workers' councils** (e.g., Kerala Urban Commission) aim to **include informal workers in governance** and build **stronger labour alliances**.

Conclusion

India's urban crisis reflects a structural imbalance between growth-led policies and labour welfare. **Addressing urban precarity** requires strengthening labour rights, **expanding affordable housing**, ensuring access to basic services, and integrating informal workers into governance. Inclusive urban planning, as seen in **participatory models like workers' councils**, can help rebuild equitable cities while balancing economic growth with social justice and resilience.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Urbanisation in India has led to the informalisation and precarity of labour rather than inclusive growth." Critically examine with suitable examples. (10 marks, 150 words)

Agri Supply Shock & Inflation

Why in News: The ongoing geopolitical tensions involving Iran have raised concerns over **fertiliser and agrochemical supply disruptions**, even as India maintains comfortable food stocks.

Key Details

- India currently has **ample wheat and rice stocks** along with a **bumper rabi crop**, keeping food inflation stable.
- However, the **Iran-related conflict has disrupted fertiliser and pesticide supply chains**, especially from West Asia.
- Prices of key inputs like **ammonia, sulphur, and DAP have sharply increased**, raising cost pressures.
- The situation poses risks for the **upcoming kharif season and future food inflation trends**.

Food Security Buffer & Inflation Stability

- **Buffer Stock Mechanism:** India maintains buffer stocks through agencies like FCI to ensure food security. As of March 2026, wheat (~23.6 MT) and rice (~36.5 MT) stocks are adequate, preventing immediate inflation spikes.
- **Bumper Rabi Production:** Favorable monsoon in 2025 and conducive weather during grain filling have increased yields of wheat, pulses, and oilseeds, strengthening supply-side stability.
- **Inflation Control through Supply:** High availability of cereals and stable sugar prices (~₹38–45/kg) indicate that **food inflation is currently under control**, aligning with RBI's inflation targeting framework.
- **Past Precedent (COVID-19):** Similar to the pandemic period, agriculture has acted as a **shock absorber**, supporting economic resilience during global crises.

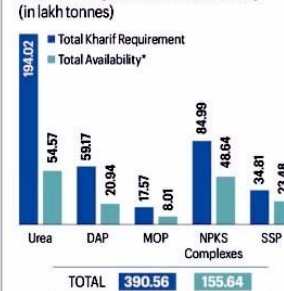
DOUBLE WORRY: RISING PRICES, FALLING STOCKS

Sale of fertiliser products (in lakh tonnes)

	APR-MAR 2024-25	APR-FEB 2024-25	APR-FEB 2025-26
Urea	387.92*	371.04	376.90*
Ammonium Sulphate	8.76	8.12	9.94
Ammonium Chloride	0.49	0.45	0.53
DAP	92.81	90.14	89.59
TSP	3.28	3.15	6.46
MAP	0.19	0.19	0.01
MOP	22.02	20.43	20.89
SSP	49.28	47.28	52.75
NPKS Complexes	142.14	136.01	134.41
TOTAL	706.91	676.81	691.48

DAP: DI-AMMONIUM PHOSPHATE; TSP: TRIPLE SUPER PHOSPHATE; MAP: MONO AMMONIUM PHOSPHATE; MOP: MURIATE OF POTASH; SSP: SINGLE SUPER PHOSPHATE. *INCLUDES 0.18 LAKH TONNES OF SULPHUR, COATED UREA. **INCLUDES 0.20 LAKH TONNES OF SULPHUR COATED UREA. SOURCE: THE FERTILISER ASSOCIATION OF INDIA.

Fertiliser Requirement vs Availability (in lakh tonnes)



*AS ON APRIL 2, 2026. SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & FARMERS WELFARE.

Fertiliser Supply Chain Vulnerability

- **Import Dependence:** India imports a large share of fertilisers and raw materials (urea, DAP, LNG, ammonia), mainly from **Gulf countries**, making it vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions.
- **Price Escalation:** Ammonia prices surged from **\$450 to \$750/tonne**, sulphur from **\$200 to \$700+**, and DAP to ~\$825, increasing subsidy burden and farmer costs.
- **Kharif Season Risk:** Current fertiliser stocks may suffice only for **early kharif demand**, raising concerns about timely availability during peak sowing months (June–July).
- **Subsidy Pressure:** Rising global prices may require recalibration of **nutrient-based subsidy (NBS)**, impacting fiscal health and policy decisions.

Agrochemical Supply Disruptions

- **Petrochemical Linkages:** Agrochemicals depend on petrochemical derivatives like **naphtha, propylene, benzene**, much of which originates from West Asia.
- **Global Supply Chain Concentration:** Around **55% of global naphtha supply** is linked to West Asia, making disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz critical for global agriculture.
- **Cost Transmission:** Increase in intermediate chemicals raises production costs of pesticides like **glyphosate**, affecting farmers' input expenses.
- **Packaging Cost Inflation:** Rising prices of HDPE, PET bottles, and packaging materials (up by 30–40%) further increase overall agrochemical costs.

Input Cost–Inflation Linkage

- **Cost-Push Inflation:** Rising fertiliser and pesticide costs can lead to **higher cost of cultivation**, eventually translating into higher food prices.
- **Farmer Profitability Impact:** Increased input costs without proportional MSP or market price rise may reduce farmers' income, affecting rural demand.
- **Delayed Inflation Effect:** While current stocks prevent immediate inflation, **future seasons (kharif and rabi)** may witness price pressures.
- **Global Transmission Channels:** Energy prices, currency depreciation, and global supply chains act as **channels of imported inflation**.

Structural Issues in Indian Agriculture

- **Imbalanced Fertiliser Use:** Overdependence on urea leads to nutrient imbalance. India consumes ~40 MT urea annually, much higher than balanced requirements.

- **Import Dependency:** Heavy reliance on imports for fertilisers and agrochemicals exposes India to **external shocks and price volatility**.
- **Low Input Efficiency:** Inefficient fertiliser usage reduces productivity and increases environmental degradation, including soil health issues.
- **Policy Distortions:** Subsidy-heavy policies often distort market signals, leading to overuse of certain inputs and underuse of others.

Opportunity for Agricultural Reforms

- **Balanced Fertilisation:** Promoting complex fertilisers (NPK) instead of urea can improve **nutrient efficiency and sustainability**.
- **Domestic Production Push:** Enhancing local manufacturing under initiatives like **Atmanirbhar Bharat** can reduce import dependence.
- **Diversification of Imports:** Expanding sourcing beyond West Asia can mitigate geopolitical risks.
- **Technological Solutions:** Adoption of precision farming, nano-fertilisers, and bio-fertilisers can reduce input intensity and improve resilience.

Conclusion

India's strong food stock position provides short-term relief from inflationary pressures, but the Iran-related supply disruptions highlight **structural vulnerabilities in agricultural inputs**. A strategic shift towards **self-reliance, balanced fertilisation, diversification of supply chains, and sustainable practices** is essential. The crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to reform India's agricultural input ecosystem and enhance long-term resilience.

Industrial Policy & Manufacturing Growth

Why in News: India's **smartphone Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** has emerged as a successful model of industrial policy, prompting debate on its replication across sectors.

Key Details

- Smartphone PLI (launched 2020) led to production rising from **\$30 billion (2020) to ~\$64 billion (FY 2025)**.
- Exports surged from **\$3.1 billion to ~\$24 billion**, increasing global share from ~1% to ~8%.
- Around **1.5–2 lakh jobs** created, with strong participation of global firms.
- New **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)** aims to deepen domestic supply chains.

Industrial Policy in India – Concept & Evolution

- **Definition & Objective:** Industrial policy refers to government interventions to promote sectors through incentives, tariffs, and reforms, aiming at **growth, employment, and competitiveness**.
- **Historical Evolution:** From the **License Raj (pre-1991)** to post-liberalisation reforms, India shifted from state-led control to **market-driven industrialisation**.
- **Contemporary Focus:** Recent policies like **Make in India, PLI schemes, and Atmanirbhar Bharat** emphasise manufacturing, exports, and integration into global value chains.

- **Global Context:** Countries like China and Vietnam have successfully used industrial policy to become **manufacturing hubs**, influencing India's strategy.

Success of Smartphone PLI – Key Outcomes

- **Export-Led Growth:** The scheme prioritised exports, leading to an **8-fold increase in smartphone exports**, integrating India into global markets.
- **Investment & Production Surge:** With about **\$1.2 billion incentive**, production reached ~\$64 billion, showing **high multiplier effect** of targeted subsidies.
- **Employment Generation:** Labour-intensive assembly created **1.5–2 lakh jobs**, including significant participation of women workers in manufacturing units.
- **Global Value Chain Integration:** Entry of firms like Foxconn and Tata Electronics strengthened India's position in **electronics supply chains**.

Export Orientation vs Import Substitution

- **Export-Led Strategy:** Unlike traditional policies, smartphone PLI focused on **exports rather than protectionism**, ensuring global competitiveness.
- **Scale Advantage:** India's domestic demand is limited compared to global markets; exports enabled **economies of scale and productivity gains**.
- **Learning from East Asia:** Countries like China followed an **export-first model**, which India is now replicating in electronics manufacturing.

Role of Downstream Assembly in Industrialisation

- **Assembly as Entry Point:** Policy targeted final assemblers, which act as **growth engines for industrial ecosystems**.
- **Job Creation Potential:** Large plants employ tens of thousands (e.g., Foxconn units), making assembly crucial for **labour absorption**.
- **MSME Linkages:** Assemblers create demand for components, benefiting **small and medium enterprises** in supply chains.
- **Sequential Development Model:** Like China and Vietnam, India is building **assembly first, then moving upstream** to components.

Supply Chain & Input Cost Rationalisation

- **Reduction in Import Duties:** Lower tariffs on components improved **cost competitiveness**, avoiding policy contradictions.
- **Ease of Input Flow:** Availability of raw materials and components ensured **smooth production cycles**.
- **Avoiding Policy Distortions:** In many sectors, high tariffs negate incentives; smartphone policy avoided this, ensuring **policy coherence**.
- **Competitiveness Factor:** Competitive input costs are essential to sustain exports in **price-sensitive global markets**.

Ease of Doing Business & Governance Support

- **Administrative Responsiveness:** Quick expansion of infrastructure (e.g., airport cargo capacity) facilitated **export logistics**.
- **Centre-State Coordination:** State governments acted as facilitators in resolving labour and operational issues.

- **Policy Stability:** Predictable policies-built **investor confidence**, attracting global manufacturers.
- **Consultative Approach:** Continuous industry consultations ensured policies were **practical and responsive**.

Limitations of PLI in Other Sectors

- **Low Disbursement Rates:** Only about **10% of allocated ₹1.97 lakh crore** PLI funds have been utilised, indicating implementation gaps.
- **Lack of Export Focus:** Many sectors remain inward-looking, limiting **global competitiveness**.
- **High Input Costs:** Tariff barriers in other industries reduce effectiveness of incentives.
- **Structural Challenges:** Issues like infrastructure gaps, logistics costs, and regulatory hurdles persist.

Way Forward for Industrial Policy

- **Export-Centric Approach:** Focus on sectors with global demand like textiles, electronics, and toys.
- **Strengthening Supply Chains:** Promote domestic component manufacturing through schemes like ECMS.
- **Labour-Intensive Manufacturing:** Prioritise sectors generating large-scale employment.
- **Long-Term Policy Commitment:** Sustained support (as seen in China spending ~2% of GDP) is needed for global competitiveness.

Conclusion

India's smartphone success offers a **replicable template for industrial policy**, highlighting the importance of export orientation, supply chain integration, and ease of doing business. However, scaling this success requires **policy coherence, sustained investment, and sector-specific strategies**. A balanced approach combining competitiveness with employment generation will be key to transforming India into a global manufacturing hub.

Insolvency Reforms & Economy

Why in News: Parliament passed the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2026** to address delays, improve recovery, and align India's insolvency framework with global best practices.

Key Details

- The **IBC Amendment 2026** aims to **speed up insolvency resolution** and reduce judicial delays.
- Introduces **out-of-court mechanism (creditor-initiated CIRP)**, **group insolvency**, and **cross-border insolvency framework**.
- Focus on **time-bound admission by NCLT** and improved creditor oversight.
- Based on recommendations of a **Select Committee (2025)** to plug systemic gaps.

IBC – Background & Objectives

- **Time-bound insolvency framework (2016):** The IBC, enacted in 2016, replaced fragmented laws like SICA and SARFAESI, aiming for **time-bound resolution (180–330 days)** of stressed assets.
- **Resolution over recovery principle:** The primary objective is to **revive viable firms** and maximise asset value rather

than mere debt recovery, preserving jobs and economic value.

- **Institutional framework:** Key institutions include **NCLT, NCLAT, Insolvency Professionals, and IBBI**, ensuring a structured insolvency ecosystem.
- **Improved credit culture:** IBC has strengthened **credit discipline**, reducing wilful defaults and improving India's ranking in the **Ease of Doing Business (Resolving Insolvency indicator)**.



Need for Fresh Amendments

- **Delays in resolution process:** Despite a 14-day admission timeline, cases often took **months to be admitted**, leading to value erosion of distressed assets.
- **Low recovery rates:** As of 2025, recovery rates hovered around **~34% for financial creditors**, raising concerns about efficiency.
- **Judicial backlog:** Overburdened **NCLT and NCLAT** led to delays in both admission and appeals, reducing investor confidence.
- **Procedural inefficiencies:** Overlaps, litigation delays, and lack of clarity in processes hindered **time-bound resolution**, contrary to IBC's core objective.

Faster Admission & Procedural Efficiency

- **Mandatory admission on default proof:** The amendment requires **NCLT to admit applications once default is proven**, eliminating discretionary delays.
- **Reduction of initial bottlenecks:** Earlier, procedural scrutiny caused delays; now, **clear criteria streamline entry into insolvency process**.
- **Time-bound judicial action:** Strengthening timelines ensures quicker initiation, preventing **asset value deterioration**.
- **Improved investor confidence:** Faster admission reduces uncertainty, encouraging **distressed asset investors and resolution applicants**.

Creditor-Initiated Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP)

- **Out-of-court mechanism:** Introduction of **creditor-driven initiation** allows resolution outside formal court processes, reducing litigation burden.
- **51% creditor approval threshold:** At least **51% of financial creditors** must agree, ensuring consensus-based decision-making.
- **Alternative to lengthy proceedings:** Provides a faster alternative compared to traditional NCLT route, improving **efficiency and recovery chances**.

- **Boost to distressed asset market:** Encourages participation of **private equity and asset reconstruction companies**, enhancing capital flow.

Group Insolvency Framework

- **Holistic resolution of corporate groups:** Allows simultaneous handling of **interlinked companies**, especially conglomerates with shared liabilities.
- **Prevents fragmented proceedings:** Earlier, separate insolvency processes led to **value loss and coordination issues**.
- **Improves recovery outcomes:** Consolidated resolution ensures **better asset valuation and coordinated restructuring**.
- **Global best practice alignment:** Reflects international trends in handling **complex corporate structures**.

Cross-Border Insolvency Framework

- **Recognition of foreign proceedings:** Provides clarity for cases involving **assets or creditors across countries**.
- **Judicial cooperation:** Enables coordination between Indian courts and foreign jurisdictions for **efficient resolution**.
- **Alignment with global norms:** Moves towards frameworks like **UNCITRAL Model Law**, enhancing India's global credibility.
- **Boost to foreign investment:** Predictable legal environment increases **investor confidence in cross-border transactions**.

Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms

- **Removal of conflict of interest:** Resolution Professionals (RPs) cannot become liquidators, ensuring **fair and unbiased decision-making**.
- **Time limit for appeals:** A **3-month timeline for NCLAT** reduces appellate delays and improves efficiency.
- **Empowering IBBI:** IBBI can now regulate **conduct and timelines of the Committee of Creditors (CoC)**.
- **Shift from criminal to civil penalties:** Minor violations now attract **civil penalties**, reducing fear of criminalisation and encouraging compliance.

Performance of IBC – Data & Outcomes

- **Resolutions achieved:** By December 2025, over **1,300+ companies resolved** under IBC.
- **Recovery amount:** Creditors recovered approximately **₹4.1 lakh crore**, reflecting significant economic impact.
- **Haircut concerns:** High haircuts in some cases highlight issues of **value erosion and delayed resolution**.
- **Systemic impact:** Improved **banking sector health**, reduction in NPAs, and strengthened financial stability.

Challenges & Concerns

- **Delay despite reforms:** Persistent delays due to litigation and capacity constraints still undermine effectiveness.
- **Haircuts and value erosion:** Creditors often accept significant losses, raising questions about **efficiency of asset valuation**.
- **Capacity constraints:** Shortage of judges and infrastructure in NCLT/NCLAT affects timely disposal.
- **Balancing interests:** Conflict between **creditor recovery and business revival** remains a key policy challenge.

Conclusion

The 2026 amendments mark a significant step toward **strengthening India's insolvency ecosystem** by improving speed, transparency, and global alignment. However, success

depends on enhancing institutional capacity, reducing litigation, and maintaining the core objective of **resolution over recovery**. A robust IBC framework is essential for ensuring financial stability, promoting investment, and sustaining economic growth.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the key features of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) 2026. How do these reforms address existing challenges in India's insolvency framework? (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Migration Governance Gaps

Why in News: Recent evacuation efforts from West Asia highlight India's **strong crisis response but weak long-term migration governance framework**.

Key Details

- India evacuated **4.75 lakh+ citizens from West Asia (2026)**, showcasing diplomatic and logistical strength.
- Around **99 lakh Indians reside in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries** (2025 estimates).
- The Gulf region contributes nearly **38% of India's total remittances (2023–24)**.
- Migration governance remains **fragmented, reactive, and data-deficient**.

Migration Governance in India

- **Internal and International Migration:** India witnesses large-scale migration both within states and abroad, driven by employment, education, and socio-economic factors.
- **Economic Significance:** India is the **world's top remittance recipient (~\$125 billion, World Bank 2023)**, reflecting migration's role in economic stability.
- **Labour Market Linkages:** Migration supports sectors like construction, services, and manufacturing, especially in urban and Gulf economies.
- **Development Indicator:** Migration is linked to **poverty reduction, skill mobility, and regional development**, but also exposes vulnerabilities.

Crisis-Driven Approach

- **Evacuation-Centric Policy:** Government response becomes visible during crises like **COVID-19 (Vande Bharat Mission)** or Gulf evacuations.
- **Neglect of Migration Lifecycle:** Policies focus on return and rescue rather than **pre-departure, working conditions, and reintegration**.
- **Short-Term Visibility:** Crisis management generates national pride but **masks structural governance gaps**.
- **Lack of Preventive Framework:** Absence of early warning systems and worker tracking leads to **delayed interventions**.

Gulf Region Dependency

- **High Indian Presence:** Nearly **99 lakh Indians live in GCC countries**, making it a key migration corridor.
- **Remittance Dependency:** Gulf contributes **~38% of India's remittance inflows**, crucial for household consumption and state economies.

- **Sectoral Employment:** Indians are concentrated in **construction, domestic work, and services**, often low-skilled and vulnerable.
- **Geopolitical Sensitivity:** Instability in West Asia directly impacts **Indian economy, employment, and welfare systems**.

Fragmented Institutional Framework

- **Multiple Ministries Involved:**
 - Ministry of External Affairs → Emigration & diplomacy
 - Ministry of Labour → Worker welfare
 - State governments → Skilling and welfare schemes
- **Lack of Coordination:** The migrant journey spans **district to international level**, but governance remains siloed.
- **Policy Discontinuity:** No single authority manages the **end-to-end migration cycle**.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Variation in state capacity leads to **uneven migrant support systems**.

Data Deficiency and Visibility Gap

- **Lack of Real-Time Data:** India lacks **granular, dynamic migration databases**, especially for internal migrants.
- **Policy Blind Spots:** Without accurate data, **anticipatory governance and welfare targeting** become difficult.
- **COVID-19 Lessons:** The migrant crisis revealed absence of **portable benefits and worker registries**.
- **Kerala Model Exception:** Kerala's migration surveys and welfare funds demonstrate **data-driven governance success**.

Structural Vulnerabilities in Migration System

- **Precarious Employment:** Migrants often face **informal contracts, wage insecurity, and poor working conditions**.

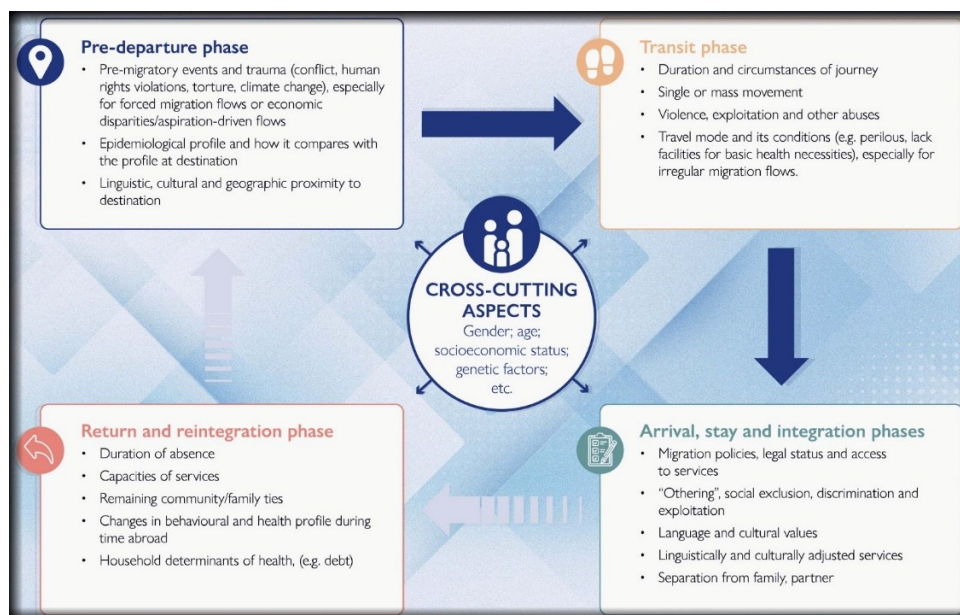
- **Rising Cost Pressures:** Inflation, LPG prices, and living costs reduce **real income and savings capacity**.
- **Recruitment Exploitation:** Lack of regulation in recruitment agencies leads to **debt traps and exploitation**.
- **Weak Reintegration Systems:** Return migrants struggle with **employment, skill utilisation, and social security**.

Policy Developments & Opportunities

- **Overseas Mobility Facilitation and Welfare Bill:** Aims to create a **structured framework for migrant protection and welfare**.
- **Bilateral Labour Agreements:** India is strengthening agreements with Gulf countries to ensure **worker rights and safety**.
- **Digital Platforms:** Initiatives like e-Migrate can improve **tracking and transparency**, but need expansion.
- **Skill India & Migration:** Aligning skilling programs with global labour demand can enhance **safe migration pathways**.

Migration as a Continuum

- **Lifecycle Approach:** Migration should be governed across stages: **Pre-departure → Employment → Welfare → Return → Reintegration**
- **Integrated Policy Framework:** Internal and international migration must be seen as **interconnected systems**.
- **Social Protection Systems:** Portability of schemes like **One Nation One Ration Card** is a step forward.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Recognising migrants as **economic contributors, not temporary labour**, is essential.



Way Forward

- **Create a Unified Migration Authority:** Integrate multiple ministries for **end-to-end governance of migration**.
- **Develop National Migration Database:** Real-time, district-level data for **evidence-based policymaking**.
- **Strengthen Social Security:** Ensure **portable benefits, insurance, and welfare schemes** for migrants.
- **Regulate Recruitment Systems:** Prevent exploitation through **strict monitoring of agencies**.

- **Enhance Bilateral Cooperation:** Secure better labour rights through **international agreements**.

Conclusion

India's migration governance must move beyond a **crisis-response model** to a **comprehensive, lifecycle-based framework**. As migration becomes central to economic growth and global engagement, ensuring **dignity, security, and welfare of migrants** is essential for inclusive development. A proactive and integrated approach will transform migration into a **driver of sustainable growth and social justice**.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. India is the largest recipient of remittances globally.
2. Gulf countries account for a significant share of Indian migrants.
3. India has a unified national migration authority.

Which of the statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the importance of migration for India's economy. Why is there a need for a lifecycle-based migration governance framework? (250 Words, 15 Marks)

development, or informal economy strength, which are relevant in India.

- **Closely Clustered Economies:** After the US and China, economies like India, UK, Japan, and Germany are clustered around **\$4 trillion**, making rankings highly volatile.

Feature	Nominal GDP (Current Prices)	Real GDP (Constant Prices)
Price Basis	Uses prices prevailing in the current year.	Uses prices of a fixed Base Year.
Inflation	Included. If prices rise, Nominal GDP rises even if output is stagnant.	Excluded. Adjusted for inflation to show actual production volume.
Calculation	$Q \times P_{(current)}$	$Q \times P_{(Base Year)}$
Utility	Used for global comparisons and debt-to-GDP ratios.	Used to measure the "Real Growth Rate" of the economy.

GDP Ranking & Exchange Rate

Why in News: India has slipped to the **6th largest economy globally in 2026** as per the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook due to GDP revision and rupee depreciation.

Key Details

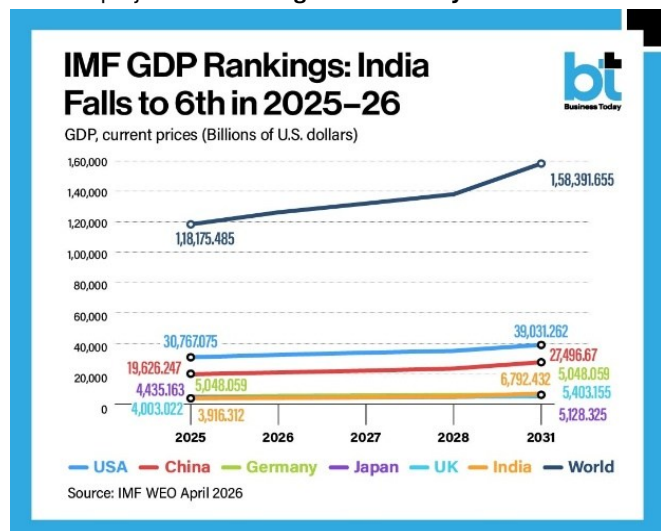
- India's GDP estimated at **\$4.15 trillion (2026)**, behind **UK (\$4.27T)** and **Japan (\$4.38T)**.
- Revision in GDP base year reduced earlier estimates (**₹357 lakh crore** → **₹345 lakh crore**).
- Depreciation of the **Indian Rupee** widened the gap in dollar terms.
- IMF projects India to **regain 4th rank by 2027**.

Reasons for India's Slip in Ranking

- **GDP Data Revision:** India revised its GDP base year in **2026**, leading to a downward adjustment of economic size, correcting earlier overestimations.
- **Exchange Rate Depreciation:** The **Indian Rupee weakened against the US Dollar**, reducing India's GDP value in dollar terms despite real growth.
- **Global Currency Movements:** The **US dollar weakened against pound and yen**, making UK and Japan appear larger in relative dollar terms.
- **Statistical vs Real Change:** The fall in ranking does not indicate economic contraction but reflects **statistical adjustments and currency effects**.

Role of Exchange Rate in GDP Ranking

- **Currency Conversion Effect:** A weaker rupee reduces the dollar value of GDP even if **domestic production increases**, highlighting external vulnerability.
- **Imported Inflation Link:** Depreciation raises import costs (oil, machinery), affecting **trade balance and inflation**, indirectly impacting growth.
- **Capital Flows & Forex:** Exchange rate volatility is influenced by **foreign investment flows, interest rates, and global uncertainty**.
- **Policy Challenge:** Maintaining currency stability while ensuring export competitiveness is a key **macroeconomic balancing act**.



India's Growth Trajectory & Structural Strengths

GDP Measurement & Global Ranking

- **Nominal GDP vs PPP:** Global rankings are based on **nominal GDP (current USD)**, not Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), where India ranks **3rd globally**.
- **Growth is Real, Ranking is Nominal:** A country can be the "fastest-growing economy" (Real GDP growth) but still slip in rankings if its currency weakens (Nominal USD value).
- **IMF Methodology:** IMF calculates GDP using **domestic output (in local currency)** and converts it into USD using **exchange rates**, making rankings sensitive to currency fluctuations.
- **Economic Size Indicator:** GDP reflects total economic output but does not capture **income inequality, human**

- **High Growth Rate:** India remains the **fastest-growing major economy (6-7%)**, supported by consumption, services, and public investment.
- **Demographic Dividend:** A young workforce provides long-term growth potential, unlike ageing economies like **Japan and Germany**.
- **Digital & Infrastructure Push:** Initiatives like **Digital India, Gati Shakti, and PLI schemes** are strengthening productivity and manufacturing capacity.
- **Export Potential:** Sectors like **IT services, pharmaceuticals, agriculture exports, and startups** enhance India's global economic presence.

Comparative Global Economic Scenario

- **Dominance of US & China:** US (~\$32 trillion) and China (~\$20 trillion) dominate, creating a large gap with other economies.
- **Stagnation in Advanced Economies:** Japan and Germany face **low growth, ageing population, and industrial slowdown**, benefiting India in long-term rankings.
- **India's Medium-Term Outlook:** IMF projects India to become the **4th largest economy by 2027** and potentially **3rd by 2030–31**.
- **Geopolitical & Trade Dynamics:** Trade agreements, global supply chains, and geopolitical shifts will influence India's economic rise.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Rupee Stability:** Improve forex reserves, boost exports, and reduce import dependence to stabilise currency.
- **Enhance Data Quality:** Transparent and robust statistical systems are essential for accurate GDP estimation and global credibility.
- **Focus on Real Growth Drivers:** Promote manufacturing, MSMEs, and employment generation to ensure **inclusive and sustainable growth**.
- **Global Integration:** Expand trade agreements and integrate with global value chains to enhance economic resilience.

Conclusion

India's slip to the **6th position is a temporary statistical phenomenon**, not a reflection of economic weakness. With strong fundamentals, demographic advantage, and sustained reforms, India remains on track to emerge as a **top global economic power**, reaffirming its long-term growth trajectory.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which organisation releases the World Economic Outlook?

- (a) World Bank
- (b) IMF
- (c) WTO
- (d) UNDP

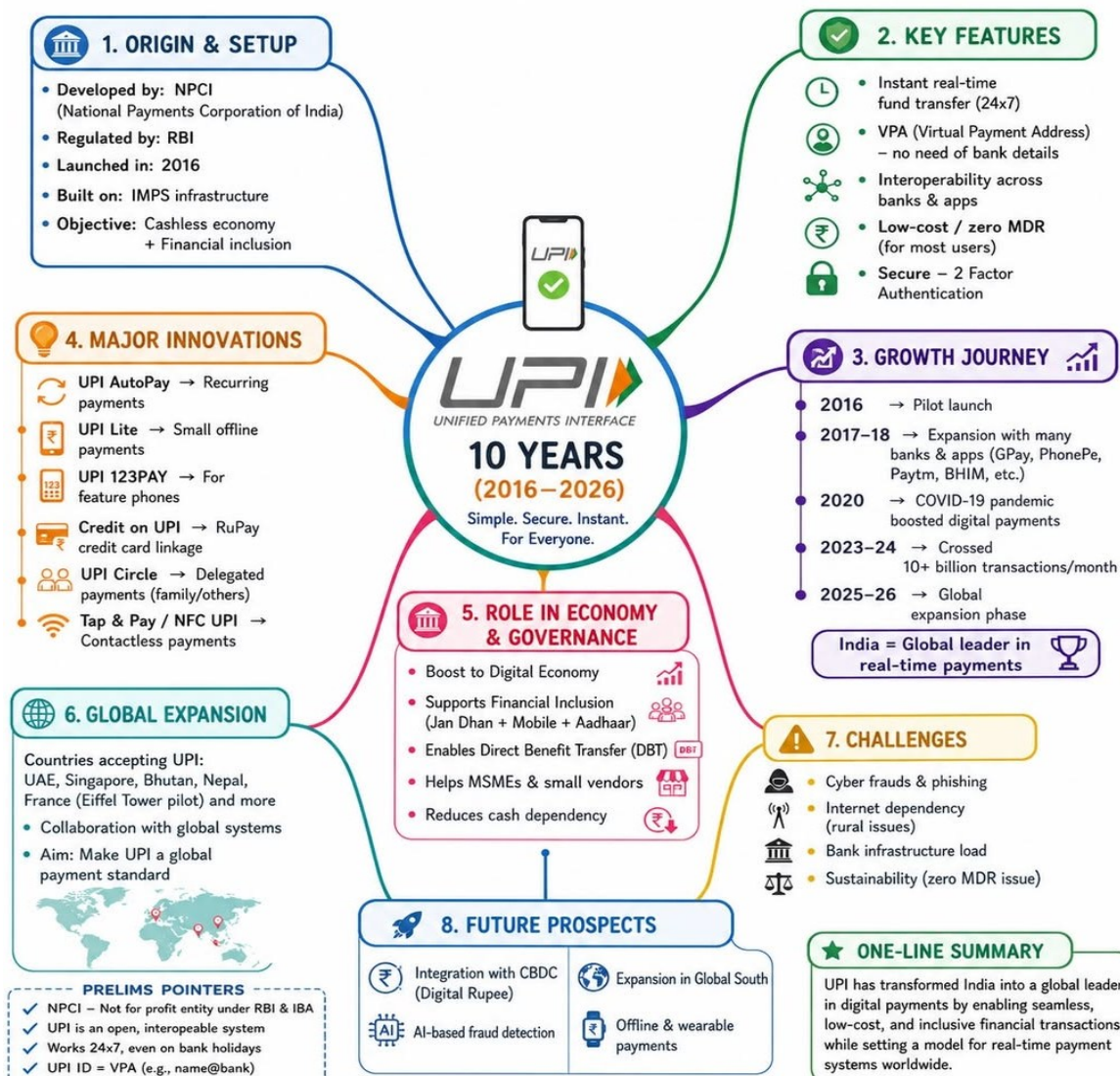
Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the factors affecting India's position in global economic rankings and its future prospects. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

UPI Completes 10 Years

Why in News: India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has completed **10 years of operations** in 2026. According to the Ministry of Finance and IMF, UPI has emerged as the **world's largest real-time payment system**, accounting for nearly **49% of global real-time digital payment transactions**.



Key Details

- UPI transaction volume increased from **2 crore transactions (FY2016-17)** to over **24,162 crore transactions (FY2025-26)**.
- Transaction value surged from **₹0.07 lakh crore** to **₹314 lakh crore** in a decade.
- UPI now processes around **66 crore daily transactions** worth nearly **₹0.86 lakh crore daily**.
- More than **703 banks** are connected to the UPI ecosystem compared to only **21 banks at launch in 2016**.
- UPI contributes nearly **85% of India's digital payment volume** and is operational in **8 countries** globally.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

- UPI was launched in **2016** by the National Payments Corporation of India under the regulatory supervision of the Reserve Bank of India.
- It is a **real-time interoperable payment system** enabling instant bank-to-bank fund transfers through mobile devices using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA).
- UPI forms a key pillar of India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** along with **Aadhaar** and **Jan Dhan Yojana**.
- The platform supports both **Person-to-Person (P2P)** and **Person-to-Merchant (P2M)** transactions seamlessly.

Growth Trajectory of UPI

Massive Increase in Transaction Volume

- UPI annual transaction volume grew nearly **12,000-fold** in 10 years, reflecting deep digital penetration across India.
- In FY2025-26, UPI recorded over **24,161 crore transactions**, making it one of the largest payment ecosystems globally.
- Monthly transaction volume crossed **2,000 crore transactions** for the first time in August 2025.
- March 2026 recorded the highest-ever monthly volume at **2,264 crore transactions**.

Surge in Transaction Value

- UPI transaction value expanded from **₹0.07 lakh crore** in FY2016-17 to **₹314 lakh crore** in FY2025-26.
- The rise indicates increasing adoption not only for micro-payments but also for larger-value transfers and commercial transactions.
- UPI has reduced dependence on cash and accelerated India's transition towards a **less-cash economy**.

UPI and Financial Inclusion

Inclusive Digital Growth

- UPI has significantly improved **financial inclusion** by enabling low-cost digital transactions for rural and urban populations alike.
- Street vendors, small merchants, gig workers, and MSMEs have increasingly adopted QR-code based payment systems.
- The platform reduced transaction costs and improved accessibility to formal financial services.
- Affordable smartphones and low-cost internet have played a crucial role in expanding UPI usage.

JAM Trinity and Governance

- UPI complements the **JAM Trinity — Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile Connectivity**.

- It has strengthened **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)** by ensuring faster and transparent transfer of subsidies and welfare benefits.
- Digital payments also help reduce leakages and improve governance efficiency.

India as Global Leader in Digital Payments

IMF Recognition

- The International Monetary Fund recognised UPI as the **world's largest real-time payment system** by transaction volume.
- India now accounts for nearly **49% of global real-time digital payment transactions**.
- UPI has become a model for developing nations seeking scalable and inclusive digital payment infrastructure.

Global Expansion of UPI

- UPI is currently operational in countries including:
 - Singapore
 - UAE
 - France
 - Bhutan
 - Nepal
 - Sri Lanka
 - Mauritius
 - Qatar
- Cross-border integration facilitates tourism payments, remittances, and diaspora transactions.
- It also strengthens India's digital diplomacy and fintech cooperation globally.

Ecosystem Strength and Institutional Participation

Expansion of Banking Network

- The number of banks connected to UPI increased from **21 banks at launch** to over **703 banks by March 2026**.
- UPI now includes participation from:
 - Public Sector Banks
 - Private Banks
 - Small Finance Banks
 - Cooperative Banks
 - Payment Banks
- This broad institutional participation has enhanced geographic reach and payment interoperability.

Transaction Segmentation and Consumer Behaviour

Person-to-Merchant (P2M) Dominance

- P2M transactions account for nearly **63% of total transaction volume**.
- Around **86% of merchant transactions are below ₹500**, highlighting UPI's dominance in everyday retail purchases.
- UPI is widely used for:
 - Grocery payments
 - Transport fares
 - Utility bills
 - Small business transactions

Person-to-Person (P2P) Transactions

- P2P transactions contribute nearly **71% of total transaction value**.
- This reflects increasing public trust in UPI for larger-value personal transfers and business settlements.
- UPI's simplicity and instant settlement mechanism have enhanced its reliability.

Economic Significance of UPI

Driver of Digital Economy

- UPI has become the backbone of India's digital economy by improving transaction efficiency and reducing cash dependency.
- It supports the formalisation of the informal economy and improves tax transparency.
- The platform has encouraged fintech innovation and startup growth in India.
- Digital payments contribute to improved ease of doing business and higher economic productivity.

Support to MSMEs and Startups

- UPI enables instant payment settlement and low-cost payment acceptance for MSMEs.
- Digital transaction records help small businesses improve access to formal credit and financial services.
- It has strengthened India's rapidly growing startup ecosystem and e-commerce sector.

Challenges Associated with UPI

Cybersecurity and Fraud Risks

- Rapid digitalisation has increased risks related to:
 - Cyber fraud
 - Phishing attacks
 - Fake payment applications
 - Data privacy concerns
- Strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure and digital literacy remains essential.

Digital Divide

- Challenges persist in rural internet penetration and smartphone accessibility.
- Elderly populations and digitally illiterate sections still face barriers in adopting digital payment systems.
- Bridging the digital divide is necessary for universal financial inclusion.

Government Initiatives Supporting UPI

Digital India Programme

Digital India has played a major role in expanding digital infrastructure and promoting digital payment adoption across India.

RBI and NPCI Innovations

- Key recent innovations include:
 - UPI Lite
 - UPI 123PAY for feature phones
 - Credit card linkage with UPI
 - Cross-border payment systems
- These initiatives aim to improve accessibility, convenience, and inclusion.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Cybersecurity:** Enhance digital security architecture and fraud prevention mechanisms.
- **Expand Rural Connectivity:** Improve internet penetration and smartphone accessibility in rural areas.
- **Promote Digital Literacy:** Increase awareness regarding safe digital payment practices.
- **Globalise UPI:** Expand international interoperability and cross-border payment partnerships.
- **Encourage Fintech Innovation:** Support emerging fintech startups through enabling regulations and digital infrastructure.

Conclusion

UPI represents one of the most successful examples of **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** globally. Over the last decade, it has transformed India's payment ecosystem by promoting financial inclusion, enabling low-cost digital transactions, and accelerating the growth of the digital economy.

With continued innovation, policy support, and international expansion, UPI is poised to strengthen India's position as a global leader in digital finance and inclusive technological development.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) was launched by which of the following organisations?

- (a) RBI
- (b) SEBI
- (c) NPCI
- (d) Ministry of Electronics and IT

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the role of UPI in promoting financial inclusion and strengthening India's digital economy. Also highlight the challenges associated with digital payment systems. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Fall in Gold Prices

Why in News: Despite the escalation of the West Asian conflict, global and domestic gold prices have witnessed a sharp and unusual decline. Traditionally, gold acts as a **safe-haven asset** during geopolitical crises, but current macroeconomic conditions have reversed this historical trend.

Key Details

- Global crude oil prices crossed nearly **USD 120 per barrel**, increasing inflationary pressures worldwide.
- Major central banks, especially the **US Federal Reserve**, have adopted a **hawkish monetary policy** stance by keeping interest rates elevated.
- Rising **US Treasury bond yields** attracted investors away from non-yielding assets like gold.
- The strengthening of the **US Dollar Index (DXY)** reduced global demand for gold by making it costlier in other currencies.
- The Reserve Bank of India increased its gold reserves beyond **880 metric tonnes by late 2025**, reflecting long-term de-dollarisation trends.

Gold as a Traditional Safe-Haven Asset

Safe-Haven Nature of Gold

- Gold is traditionally considered a **safe-haven asset**, meaning investors prefer it during periods of financial instability, geopolitical conflict, or inflationary uncertainty.
- Historically, gold prices surged during events such as:
 - 2008 Global Financial Crisis
 - Covid-19 Pandemic
 - Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2022)
- The present decline in gold prices despite geopolitical tensions reflects changing global macroeconomic conditions.

Gold and Interest Rates

- Gold is a **non-yielding asset**, meaning it does not generate interest or dividend income.

- When central banks increase interest rates, investors prefer interest-bearing instruments like government bonds.
- Higher interest rates increase the **opportunity cost of holding gold**, thereby reducing demand.
- Consequently, gold prices often show an **inverse relationship with interest rates**.

Factors Responsible for the Fall in Gold Prices

Oil Price Shock and Inflationary Pressures

- The West Asian conflict disrupted global oil supply chains, causing a sharp increase in crude oil prices.
- Higher energy prices contributed to inflationary pressures across economies.
- To contain inflation, central banks postponed anticipated rate cuts and maintained a tighter monetary policy stance.
- The expectation of prolonged high interest rates weakened gold demand globally.

Rising Bond Yields

- US Treasury bonds became highly attractive because of rising interest rates and guaranteed returns.
- Global investors shifted funds from gold to fixed-income securities offering better returns.
- This capital outflow reduced investment demand for gold, causing prices to decline further.

Strengthening of the US Dollar

- Gold is internationally priced in **US Dollars (USD)**.
- A stronger dollar makes gold more expensive for buyers using other currencies, reducing international demand.
- The appreciation of the US Dollar Index (DXY) therefore exerts downward pressure on gold prices.
- This reflects the traditional **inverse relationship between gold and the US dollar**.

Liquidity Crunch and Profit Booking

- Gold prices had reached record highs before the recent correction.
- As global equity markets witnessed sharp sell-offs, investors faced liquidity shortages and margin calls.
- Many investors sold profitable gold holdings to compensate for stock market losses.
- This large-scale profit booking increased supply in the gold market, accelerating price declines.

US Dollar Emerging as Primary Safe Haven

Dollar Dominance in Global Markets

- In the short term, the US Dollar has emerged as the preferred safe-haven asset instead of gold.
- Global oil trade remains largely dollar-denominated under the **Petrodollar System**.
- Rising oil prices increased global demand for dollars, strengthening the US currency further.
- This strengthened dollar reduced the attractiveness of gold as an alternative store of value.

Long-Term De-dollarisation Trends

- Despite short-term corrections, many central banks continue increasing gold reserves.
- Emerging economies are diversifying reserves to reduce dependence on the US Dollar.
- This strategy is linked to concerns regarding:
 - Western financial sanctions
 - Currency weaponisation
 - Global financial instability

- India, China, and several BRICS nations are actively pursuing reserve diversification strategies.

Gold and India

Gold Reserves in India

- India considers gold a strategically important reserve asset.
- The Reserve Bank of India significantly increased gold holdings to strengthen forex reserve diversification.
- By late 2025, RBI's gold reserves exceeded **880 metric tonnes**, accounting for nearly **15.17% of total foreign exchange reserves**.

Gold Producing Regions in India

- Gold in India is mainly found in the **Peninsular Plateau region**.
- Important gold-producing states include:
 - Karnataka
 - Andhra Pradesh
 - Jharkhand
 - Rajasthan
- Kolar Gold Fields is among the world's oldest and deepest gold mining regions.
- Hutti Gold Mines currently remains India's major operational gold mining centre.

Scientific and Economic Features of Gold

Physical and Chemical Properties

- Gold's chemical symbol is **Au**, derived from the Latin word *Aurum*.
- Its atomic number is **79**.
- Gold is the most **malleable** and **ductile** metal known.
- It is a **noble metal**, meaning it does not rust, corrode, or tarnish easily.
- Gold dissolves only in **Aqua Regia**, a mixture of nitric acid and hydrochloric acid.

Industrial and Technological Applications

- Gold is an excellent conductor of electricity and heat.
- It is widely used in:
 - Electronics
 - Aerospace technology
 - Dentistry and medicine
 - Nanotechnology
- Gold nanoparticles are increasingly used in advanced medical diagnostics and targeted therapies.

Economic Significance of Gold

Strategic Reserve Asset

- Central banks maintain gold reserves as protection against global financial instability and currency fluctuations.
- Gold also acts as a hedge against inflation and exchange rate volatility.
- Historically, gold formed the basis of the **Gold Standard System** used in international monetary arrangements.

Cultural and Household Importance in India

- India is among the world's largest consumers of gold due to cultural, social, and investment-related demand.
- Gold serves as a store of wealth, especially in rural areas lacking formal financial penetration.
- It also contributes significantly to India's jewellery and gems export sector.

Way Forward

- **Diversify Reserve Assets:** Countries should maintain balanced reserve portfolios combining gold, foreign currencies, and strategic assets.

- **Strengthen Domestic Mining:** India should promote sustainable exploration and mining to reduce import dependence.
- **Enhance Financial Literacy:** Investors should understand the impact of interest rates and currency movements on commodity prices.
- **Promote Gold Monetisation:** Schemes like Gold Monetisation Scheme and Sovereign Gold Bonds should be expanded.
- **Monitor Global Financial Risks:** Policymakers must carefully assess oil shocks, inflation trends, and geopolitical uncertainties.

Conclusion

The recent decline in gold prices despite geopolitical tensions reflects the dominance of macroeconomic forces such as rising interest rates, stronger dollar demand, and bond market attractiveness. While gold continues to remain a long-term strategic reserve asset and safe-haven investment, short-term market behaviour increasingly depends on global monetary policy and liquidity conditions.

India's growing gold reserves and long-term de-dollarisation trends indicate that gold will continue to hold significant economic and strategic importance in the evolving global financial order.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Gold dissolves in which of the following substances?

- (a) Sulphuric Acid
- (b) Hydrochloric Acid
- (c) Nitric Acid
- (d) Aqua Regia

Answer: (d)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the factors responsible for the recent fall in gold prices despite geopolitical tensions. Also examine the strategic significance of gold in the global economy. (150 words, 10 marks)

Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs)

Why in News: The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in its March 2026 report titled *“Understanding and Mitigating the Risks of Offshore Virtual Asset Service Providers”* highlighted India's regulatory and enforcement actions against offshore crypto platforms operating beyond domestic supervision.

Key Details

- India is setting up a **Virtual Asset Lab** to detect unregistered and high-risk crypto platforms using analytics and automated surveillance.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs launched the **Sahyog Portal** for coordinated takedown of unlawful digital content and cyber-related activities.
- The Department of Revenue established a **Virtual Assets Contact Sub-Group (2023)** for inter-agency coordination on crypto-related risks.
- Agencies like the Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation, and National Investigation Agency are

investigating offshore cybercrime networks linked to crypto scams.

- The Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) has mandated VASPs to appoint **India-based Principal Officers** for compliance with the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs)

Meaning and Definition

- A **Virtual Asset Service Provider (VASP)** is defined by FATF as an entity that conducts activities involving virtual assets on behalf of customers.
- **These activities include:**
 - Exchange between virtual assets and fiat currencies
 - Transfer of virtual assets
 - Custody and administration of crypto assets
 - Financial services related to virtual asset issuance
- VASPs include crypto exchanges, custodial wallet providers, crypto ATM operators, and digital asset trading platforms.

Offshore Virtual Asset Service Providers (oVASPs)

Meaning of oVASPs

- Offshore Virtual Asset Service Providers (oVASPs) are crypto-related entities operating outside a country's domestic regulatory framework.
- These platforms often function from jurisdictions with weak or lenient financial regulations.
- oVASPs provide services involving cryptocurrencies, NFTs, tokens, and digital assets without direct oversight from regulators like the Reserve Bank of India or Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Key Features of Offshore VASPs

Jurisdictional Arbitrage

- oVASPs often establish operations in countries with weak regulatory standards to avoid strict compliance obligations.
- This creates “regulatory arbitrage,” allowing entities to bypass stronger laws applicable in other jurisdictions.

Cross-Border Digital Operations

- oVASPs operate through digital platforms without requiring physical presence in user countries.
- This cross-border nature makes enforcement and legal accountability difficult for national authorities.

Lack of Registration and Oversight

- Many offshore platforms remain unregistered with domestic regulators and function beyond supervisory control.
- Absence of regulation increases risks related to fraud, money laundering, and investor exploitation.

Anonymity and Weak KYC Compliance

- oVASPs frequently lack robust **Know Your Customer (KYC)** and customer verification mechanisms.
- The pseudonymous nature of crypto transactions complicates identification of users and suspicious activities.

India's Regulatory Measures Against oVASPs

Virtual Asset Lab

- India is establishing a **Virtual Asset Lab** to identify high-risk and unregistered crypto platforms.

- The lab will use:
 - Blockchain analytics
 - Open-source intelligence
 - Automated web surveillance
 - Transaction monitoring systems
- This reflects India's shift towards technology-driven crypto regulation and enforcement.

Sahyog Portal

- The Ministry of Home Affairs launched the **Sahyog Portal** to coordinate action against unlawful online activities.
- It enables streamlined communication with social media platforms, web hosts, and digital intermediaries for content takedown and cyber enforcement.

Inter-Agency Coordination

- The Department of Revenue formed a **Virtual Assets Contact Sub-Group** in July 2023.

- It facilitates coordination among:
 - Enforcement agencies
 - Intelligence bodies
 - Financial regulators
 - Cybercrime units
- This mechanism supports sharing of typologies, risk trends, and enforcement strategies.

Mandatory India-based Principal Officers

- FIU-India requires VASPs to appoint India-based Principal Officers responsible for regulatory compliance.
- Their responsibilities include:
 - Filing Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs)
 - Monitoring transactions
 - Ensuring compliance with PMLA provisions
- This strengthens accountability of crypto platforms operating in India.



FATF and Global Crypto Regulation

FATF Recommendations

- The Financial Action Task Force provides international standards for combating:
 - Money laundering
 - Terror financing
 - Illicit financial flows
- FATF introduced the **"Travel Rule"** requiring VASPs to share sender and recipient information during transactions.
- The objective is to reduce anonymity and improve transparency in virtual asset transactions.

Crypto and Financial Security

- FATF highlighted that unregulated offshore platforms can be exploited for:
 - Terror financing
 - Cybercrime proceeds
 - Drug trafficking
 - Illegal cross-border transfers
- The report stressed the need for stronger international cooperation and harmonised regulations.

Challenges Associated with Offshore VASPs

Financial Integrity Risks

- oVASPs can facilitate money laundering and financing of terrorism due to weak oversight mechanisms.
- The pseudonymous structure of crypto transactions reduces traceability of illicit funds.

Consumer Protection Concerns

- Users often lack legal protection against fraud, hacking, insolvency, or platform collapse.
- Investors are exposed to:
 - High volatility
 - Ponzi schemes
 - Fraudulent crypto projects
 - Market manipulation

Capital Flight and Tax Evasion

- Offshore platforms enable unaccounted cross-border movement of funds, leading to capital flight.

- They reduce tax compliance and impact government revenue mobilisation.

National Security Threats

- oVASPs may be misused for darknet transactions, illicit trade, and cybercrime financing.
- This creates serious challenges for national security and internal stability.

India's Crypto Taxation Policy

2022 Virtual Asset Tax Regime

- India introduced taxation on virtual digital assets in 2022 including:
 - 30% tax on crypto gains
 - 1% TDS on crypto transactions
- Following these measures, a significant share of trading activity reportedly shifted to offshore unregistered platforms.
- This highlighted the challenge of balancing regulation with innovation and market competitiveness.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen International Cooperation:** Enhance collaboration through FATF, G20, and global regulatory frameworks for coordinated crypto regulation.
- **Harmonise Regulations:** Develop common international standards to reduce regulatory arbitrage and prevent misuse of offshore platforms.
- **Enhance Domestic Legal Framework:** Expand jurisdiction over foreign crypto entities serving Indian users and ensure stronger enforcement.
- **Adopt Technological Solutions:** Use advanced blockchain analytics, AI-driven monitoring, and digital surveillance tools for effective transaction tracking.

- **Promote Consumer Awareness:** Improve investor education regarding crypto risks, cyber fraud, and safe digital asset practices.

Conclusion

Virtual Asset Service Providers have emerged as a significant component of the global digital economy, but offshore unregulated platforms pose serious risks related to money laundering, terror financing, tax evasion, and cybercrime. India's evolving regulatory framework, technological surveillance mechanisms, and inter-agency coordination reflect a proactive approach towards balancing innovation with financial security. A harmonised global regulatory architecture, combined with strong domestic enforcement and technological capacity, will be essential to ensure safe, transparent, and accountable growth of the virtual asset ecosystem.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following organisation(s) provides global standards for regulation of Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs)?

- (a) IMF
- (b) FATF
- (c) WTO
- (d) BIS

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the challenges posed by Offshore Virtual Asset Service Providers (oVASPs) to financial integrity and national security. Examine India's regulatory response in this regard. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

ENVIRONMENT & GEOGRAPHY

Elastic rules

Why in News: India's 2026 amendments to **Plastic Waste Management Rules** highlight weak enforcement, **flexible compliance**, and shifting focus to recycled content, raising concerns over **ineffective waste collection**, accountability gaps, and environmental outcomes.















Key Details

- **Evolving rules (since 2016)** aim to curb plastic waste but show **implementation challenges**
- **EPR framework (2022)** set rising targets up to **100% recycling by 2024–25**
- **2026 amendments** mandate **30–60% recycled content** in rigid plastic

- **Compliance flexibility** allows companies to **carry forward shortfalls for 3 years**
- **Major gaps:** low collection (50–60%), no future targets, reliance on **trading certificates**

Background of Plastic Waste Rules

- India's **Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016)** have been **regularly amended**, showing a continuously evolving policy approach.
- The **latest amendments (March 31, 2026)** indicate **limitations in effectively controlling plastic waste**.
- The core aim has been to **reduce plastic dumping** in landfills, rivers, oceans, and public spaces.

The 7 Types of Plastics						
						
PETE	HDPE	PVC	LDPE	PP	PS	Other
Polyethylene Terephthalate	High-Density Polyethylene	Polyvinyl Chloride	Low-Density Polyethylene	Polypropylene	Polystyrene	Various Plastics
Soda bottles, water bottles, food packaging	Milk jugs, detergent bottles, shampoo containers	Pipes, window frames, vinyl flooring, medical equipment	Plastic bags, six-pack rings, various containers, plastic wraps	Food containers, bottle caps, straws, textiles, automotive parts	Disposable coffee cups, plastic food boxes, cutlery, insulation	Sunglasses, compact discs, baby bottles, large water jugs
Recycled? Yes	Recycled? Yes	Recycled? Rarely	Recycled? Yes, but uncommon	Recycled? Yes	Recycled? Rarely	Recycled? Rarely
						

Rationale Behind the Rules

- Plastic is **widely used** due to its **versatility, low cost, and flexibility**.
- These same qualities make it **difficult to collect, recycle, and regulate**.
- Hence, strong regulatory mechanisms became **necessary to manage plastic waste sustainably**.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Framework

- Introduced in **2022**, making **producers, importers, and brand owners (PIBOs)** responsible for waste.
- Targets for plastic waste processing:
 - **35% in 2021–22**
 - **70% in 2022–23**
 - **100% by 2024–25**

- The objective was to ensure **accountability across the plastic lifecycle**.

Key Changes in 2026 Amendments

- Mandatory use of **recycled plastic content** in packaging:
 - **30% (minimum) for rigid plastic**, rising to **60% by 2028–29**
- Introduction of **reuse obligations** alongside recycling targets
- Provision allowing companies to **carry forward shortfalls for up to 3 years**, provided partial compliance each year

Concerns and Policy Gaps

- Companies can **delay meeting targets**, weakening enforcement (e.g., 2025–26 targets extendable to 2028–29)
- Current collection efficiency is only around **50–60%**, far below targets
- **No clear future targets** beyond 2025
- Reliance on **market mechanisms (trading certificates)** may dilute accountability
- Risk that **reuse and recycling targets remain unmet**, undermining the **EPR regime's intent**

Conclusion

While the 2026 amendments attempt to strengthen plastic waste management by promoting recycled content and reuse, weak **enforcement and flexible compliance** risk diluting their effectiveness. Without strict monitoring, clear future targets, and improved collection systems, the **EPR framework** may fail to achieve its environmental objectives. A balanced approach combining accountability, incentives, and **robust implementation** is essential for sustainable plastic waste management.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Critically examine the effectiveness of India's Plastic Waste Management Rules and the challenges in implementing the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework. (10 marks, 150 words)

Arrest the grief

Why in News: The **National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary** is in news due to rising illegal sand mining, violence, and **Supreme Court** of India intervention highlighting governance failure and ecological threats.

Key Details

- Protects endangered species like **gharial** and **Ganges River Dolphin**.
- Sand mining destroys **critical breeding habitats** (sandbars).
- Mafia thrives due to **inter-state jurisdiction gaps**.
- Despite bans by **National Green Tribunal**, enforcement remains weak.
- Increasing **violence and use of advanced weapons** by miners.
- Local unemployment fuels **recruitment into illegal mining networks**.

Ecological Importance of Chambal Sanctuary

- The **National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary** protects a **lentic (flowing river) ecosystem** across three States.
- It is a critical habitat for **endangered and critically endangered species**.
- Key species include:
 - **Gharial (critically endangered)**
 - **Red-crowned roofed turtle**
 - **Ganges River Dolphin (endangered)**
- These species depend heavily on **sandbanks and sandbars** for nesting and survival.

Threat from Illegal Sand Mining

- **Organised sand-mining mafia** has severely damaged the ecosystem.

- Sand is extracted to meet **construction boom demand in North India**.
- The **Supreme Court of India** termed them “**modern dacoits**.”
- Mining directly destroys **critical habitats**, especially breeding grounds.

Governance Failures and Jurisdictional Gaps

- Sanctuary spans **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh**, leading to **coordination gaps**.
- Despite bans by courts and the **National Green Tribunal**, enforcement remains weak.
- State governments often **shift responsibility**, enabling illegal mining.
- This regulatory paralysis has allowed mafias to flourish.

Rising Violence and Criminalisation

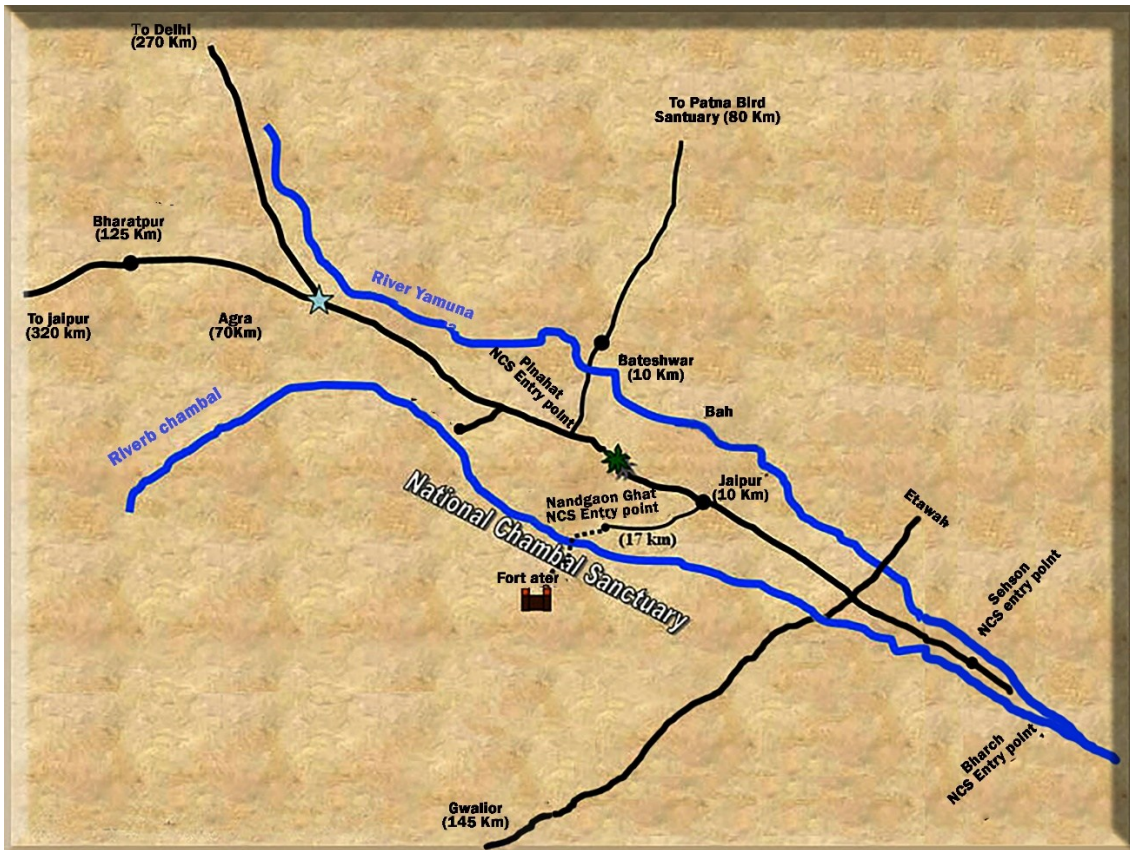
- Illegal miners have turned **highly violent and organised**:
 - Ran over **forest guards and police (2017–2024)**
 - Opened fire during enforcement raids
- Use of **technology (GPS, mobile apps)** to track police movement
- By 2023, syndicates used **semi-automatic weapons**, overpowering local authorities

Policy Dilemmas and Judicial Intervention

- States attempted to **legalise limited mining inside the sanctuary**:
 - **Madhya Pradesh** proposal stalled and withdrawn
 - **Rajasthan** proposal blocked by Court
- The **Supreme Court** took **suo motu cognisance** and warned states using laws like:
 - **National Security Act**
 - **Goonda Act**
- Raises debate on whether courts should **regulate or enforce governance**

National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary

- **About:** The **National Chambal Sanctuary**, also known as the **National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary**, is one of India's most ecologically significant riverine protected areas.
 - It is the first and **only tri-state protected area** (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh) in the country, spanning approximately **5,400 sq km** along a **600 km stretch** of the Chambal River (960-km).
- **Biodiversity:** It harbors nearly **90%** of the world's remaining **wild Gharial population** and a significant number of **endangered Ganges River Dolphins**. Other key species are **Marsh crocodile (mugger)**, **Red-crowned roof turtle**, **Smooth-coated otter**, striped hyena, and over 330 bird species e.g., **Indian skimmer**.
 - It forms part of India's **Project Crocodile** initiative launched in **1975** to address the severe decline of crocodilian populations.
- **Conservation Status:** It is recognized as an **Important Bird Area (IBA)**. It is a **proposed Ramsar Site**, a candidate for **UNESCO World Heritage Site** status, and classified as an **IUCN Category IV protected area** (habitat/species management area).
- **Ecological Uniqueness:** The **Chambal River** remains one of **India's cleanest and most unpolluted rivers**, creating a unique lotic ecosystem of **deep channels, sandbanks, and ravines (beehad)**.



Socio-economic Roots and Way Forward

- Chambal ravines have **poor agricultural viability**, limiting livelihoods
- Many youths join mining as **economic necessity**, aiding mafia networks
- Pure **force-based crackdowns may backfire** by increasing local resentment
- Sustainable solution requires:
 - **Alternative livelihoods** for locals
 - **Fair and consistent enforcement**
 - Reducing **social support for illegal networks**
- Long-term change depends on **balancing ecology with socio-economic justice**

Conclusion

The Chambal crisis reflects a deeper governance and livelihood challenge. Mere coercive action cannot **dismantle entrenched illegal economies**. Sustainable conservation requires strengthening institutions, ensuring inter-state coordination, and **providing viable livelihood alternatives**. Balanced enforcement with community participation is essential to protect biodiversity while **addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities**, ensuring long-term ecological security and rule of law.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following with reference to National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary:

1. The sanctuary spans across Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
2. It is primarily established for the conservation of the gharial.
3. It is located in the basin of the Ganga River.

How many of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: b

Climate change as a public health emergency

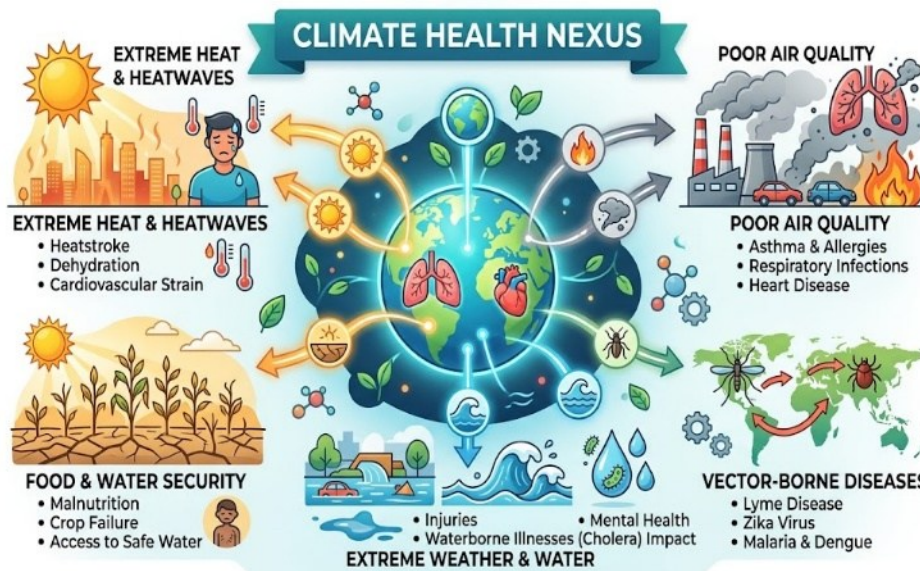
Why in News: Climate change is increasingly recognised as a **public health emergency in India**, as rising temperatures, extreme weather, and pollution are intensifying diseases, expanding their spread, and straining healthcare systems.

Key Details

- Climate change **intensifies existing diseases** and health risks
- Floods and droughts increase **waterborne and diarrhoeal diseases**
- Rising temperatures expand **vector-borne diseases** like dengue, malaria
- Air pollution (PM2.5) causes **respiratory and cardiovascular issues**
- Heat stress impacts **vulnerable groups and infant health outcomes**

Climate Change as a Public Health Crisis

- Climate change is no longer just an environmental issue but a **major health emergency**.
- It **intensifies existing diseases** and creates conditions for new health threats.
- Its impact goes beyond disasters to **long-term medical consequences**.



Water Extremes and Disease Burden

- **Urban flooding** (e.g., Mumbai) increases **waterborne diseases** like cholera and typhoid.
- Overloaded sanitation systems contaminate **drinking water sources**.
- **Drought-hit regions** face unsafe water use, raising **diarrhoeal diseases and dehydration**.

Expanding Spread of Infectious Diseases

- Changing climate patterns are increasing **vector-borne diseases** like dengue and malaria.
- Warmer temperatures extend **mosquito breeding seasons and regions**.
- Diseases are spreading to **new geographies with low immunity levels**.

Air Pollution and Multi-Organ Impact

- Rising energy use increases **PM2.5 pollution**, harming lungs, heart, and kidneys.
- Leads to **respiratory illnesses**, cardiovascular diseases, and kidney damage.
- Pollution and heat together create a **harmful feedback loop** worsening health risks.

Heat Stress and Vulnerable Populations

- Increasing temperatures cause **heat strokes and cardiovascular strain**.
- Outdoor workers and poor populations are **most affected**.
- Rising night temperatures reduce **body recovery time**, worsening health outcomes.
- Linked to **preterm births and low birth weight in infants**.

Food Security and Nutritional Impacts

- Climate change disrupts **crop production and food supply**.
- Leads to **malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies**, especially in children.
- Heat stress reduces **milk production**, affecting nutrition.
- Overall, weak nutrition increases **disease vulnerability and poor immunity**.

Conclusion

Climate change must be **addressed as a public health priority**, not merely an environmental issue. **Strengthening healthcare systems**, improving climate-resilient infrastructure, and ensuring equitable access to resources are essential.

Integrating **health considerations** into climate policies, enhancing early warning systems, and **protecting vulnerable populations** will be key to reducing risks and building long-term resilience against climate-induced health impacts.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Climate change is emerging as a major public health crisis in India." Discuss the various health impacts of climate change and suggest measures to build a climate-resilient healthcare system. (15 marks, 250 words)

India's updated climate pledges

Why in News: India announced **revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** under the Paris Agreement, updating climate targets amid global pressures, balancing development needs, energy constraints, and commitments toward climate justice and sustainable growth.

Key Details

- Targets **47% emissions intensity reduction** by 2035
- **60% power capacity** from non-fossil fuels
- Enhanced **carbon sink (3.5–4 billion tonnes)**
- Balances **development needs with climate goals**
- Faces **high costs of renewable transition**

India's Updated NDCs: A Balanced Step Forward

- India's revised **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** under the Paris Agreement reflect a **measured and pragmatic approach**.
- Focus remains on **continuity and gradual progress** rather than drastic shifts.
- Policies are shaped amid **energy and developmental challenges**.
- Commitments align with **climate justice** and India's role as a **developing nation**.
- Government expresses confidence in meeting **equitable global responsibilities**.

Three Key Climate Targets

- **Emission intensity reduction:** Target raised to **47% below 2005 levels by 2035**.
- **Non-fossil energy capacity:** Aim for **60% installed power capacity**.

- **Carbon sink enhancement:** Increase-forest cover to absorb **3.5–4 billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent**.
- These targets reflect **incremental strengthening** of earlier commitments.
- Emphasis on **long-term sustainability goals**.

Structural Constraints and Policy Context

- India remains a **lower-middle-income** country with limited resources.
- Long-standing constraints shape climate choices under the UNFCCC.
- **Paris Agreement cycle** requires updating commitments every 5 years.
- Recent **global climate uncertainties** influence policy decisions.
- Short-term realities increasingly affect long-term commitments.

India's Expanding Climate Action Efforts

- Strong push for **electric vehicles and energy efficiency**.
- Rapid expansion of **renewable energy sources**.
- Promotion of **green hydrogen and carbon capture technologies**.
- Active involvement of **both public and private sectors**.

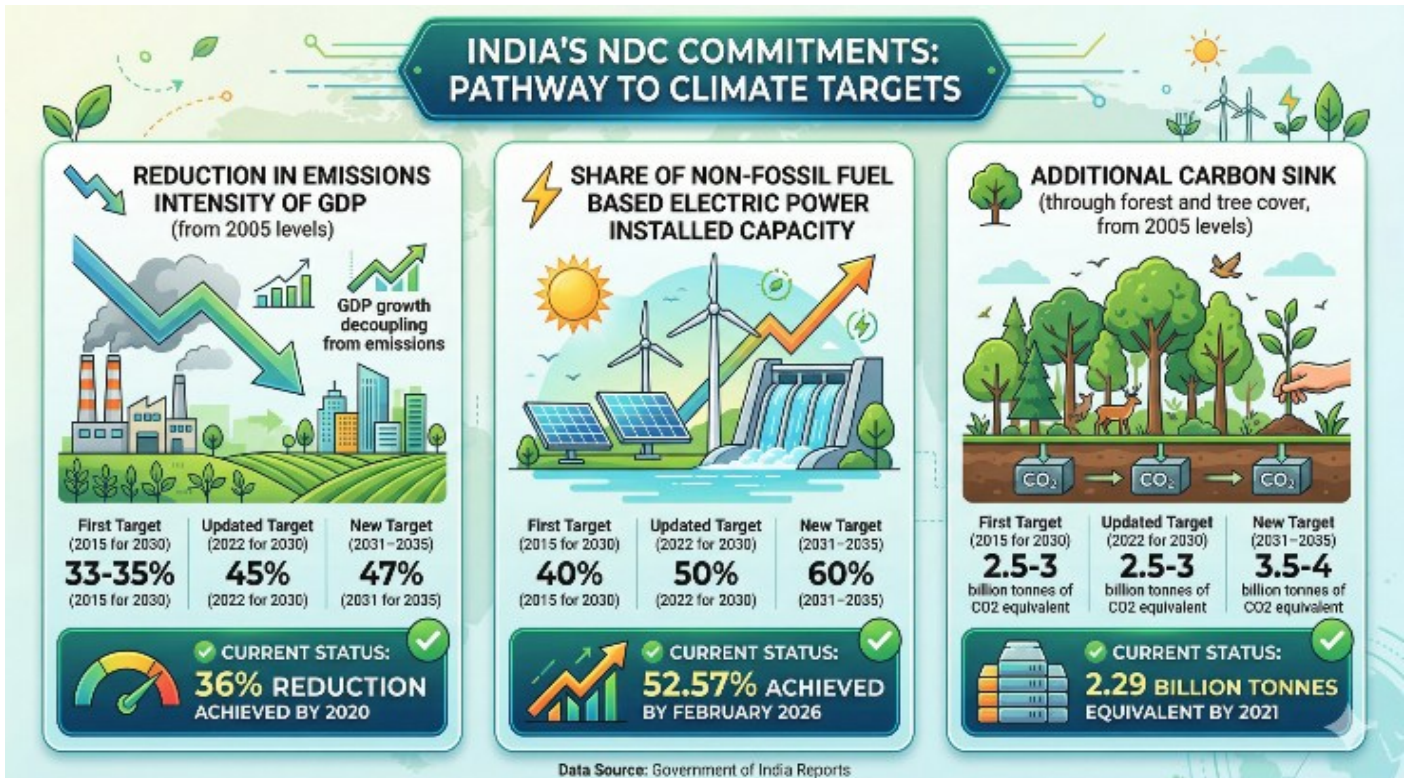
- However, not all actions are converted into **formal NDC commitments** due to accountability requirements.

Challenges and Costs of Green Transition

- India's energy system is still **coal-dependent**.
- Renewable expansion involves **high financial and infrastructural costs**.
- **Battery storage and grid balancing** remain expensive and limited.
- Hydropower faces **environmental and regulatory constraints**.
- Transition increases **operational costs of thermal power** and overall economic burden.

Debate, Criticism, and Developmental Priorities

- Critics argue India should do more for **1.5°C global target**.
- Others question adequacy of **renewable vs capacity metrics**.
- "India can do more" arguments often ignore **development needs**.
- Future requires **industrial growth, urbanisation, and energy access**.
- India's commitments remain **strategic, cautious, and based on national circumstances**.



Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

- A **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** is a country's official climate action plan submitted under the Paris Agreement, outlining its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change impacts.
- It is **self-determined**, meaning each country sets its own targets based on national circumstances, and is **time-bound and progressive**, with updates every 5–10 years that must reflect increasing ambition.

- NDCs typically include emission reduction goals, renewable energy targets, adaptation strategies, and financial or technological needs.
- They form the **core operational mechanism** of the Paris Agreement, as global climate action depends on the collective ambition and effective implementation of these national commitments.
- **India's NDC Journey: First NDC (2015)**, using **2005 as the baseline year**, targeting a 33–35% reduction in emissions intensity, ~40% non-fossil capacity, and creation of a 2.5–3 billion tonne carbon sink by 2030. It was strengthened through the **Updated NDC (2022)**, raising ambition to a 45% emissions intensity reduction (from

2005 levels) and 50% non-fossil power capacity, aligned with announcements at the COP26 (Glasgow).

Conclusion

India's revised NDCs reflect a pragmatic balance between climate responsibility and developmental priorities. While advancing mitigation targets, India remains mindful of structural constraints, energy dependence, and financial limitations. A gradual, strategic approach ensures sustainability without compromising growth. Strengthening global cooperation and climate finance remains essential for enabling developing nations like India to scale up ambition while safeguarding equitable development and energy security.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "India's revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reflect a balance between climate commitments and developmental priorities." Discuss the key features of the revised NDCs and critically examine the challenges India faces in achieving its climate targets. (15 marks, 250 words)

Urban Air Pollution Governance

Why in News: The Delhi government has launched an early Air Pollution Mitigation Action Plan 2026 to tackle winter smog through regulatory, technological, and enforcement-based measures.

Key Details

- Entry of only **BS-VI, CNG, or electric goods vehicles** from November to curb vehicular pollution.
- Strict enforcement of **'No PUC, No Fuel'** rule and decongestion of **62 pollution hotspots**.
- Expansion of public transport with a target of **13,760 buses (priority to e-buses)** and **32,000 EV charging points**.
- Establishment of **Green War Room, real-time monitoring systems, and ward-level 'Vayu Rakshak' teams**.

Sources of Urban Air Pollution

- **Vehicular Emissions:** Vehicles contribute significantly to PM_{2.5} and NO_x levels, especially in megacities like Delhi, where high vehicle density leads to persistent air quality deterioration.
- **Road Dust and Construction Activity:** Dust from unpaved roads and construction sites accounts for nearly **30–40% of particulate pollution** in urban areas, particularly during dry winter months.
- **Industrial and Biomass Burning:** Industrial emissions and stubble burning in neighbouring states add to transboundary pollution, worsening seasonal smog conditions.
- **Meteorological Factors:** Temperature inversion and low wind speed during winters trap pollutants, leading to **severe AQI levels (often above 400 – "Severe" category)**.

Regulatory Measures & Policy Framework

- **Bharat Stage (BS-VI) Norms:** Implementation of BS-VI emission standards significantly reduces sulphur content and vehicular emissions, aligning India with global emission standards.

- **'No PUC, No Fuel' Enforcement:** Pollution Under Control (PUC) certification ensures vehicles meet emission norms; strict enforcement increases compliance and reduces polluting vehicles.
- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** A statutory mechanism under the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)**, GRAP imposes restrictions based on AQI levels.
- **Environmental Protection Framework:** Laws like the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981** and policies under the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** guide pollution control efforts.

Technological Interventions & Smart Governance

- **Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS):** AI-based traffic systems optimise flow, reduce congestion, and lower emissions caused by idling vehicles.
- **Real-time Air Quality Monitoring:** Expansion of monitoring networks and use of data analytics enable **evidence-based policymaking and timely interventions**.
- **Green War Room & Command Centre:** Centralised platforms improve coordination among agencies, ensuring **accountability, rapid response, and policy enforcement**.
- **Dust Control Technologies:** Use of mechanical sweepers, anti-smog guns, and mist systems helps reduce particulate matter from road dust and construction sites.

Sustainable Urban Mobility & EV Transition

- **Public Transport Expansion:** Increasing bus fleet to **13,760 by 2028-29** aims to reduce dependence on private vehicles and lower per capita emissions.
- **Electric Mobility Push:** Installation of **32,000 EV charging stations** and promotion of e-buses, e-autos, and two-wheelers supports decarbonisation of transport.
- **Integrated Transport Systems:** Integration of Metro, RRTS, and feeder services enhances last-mile connectivity, improving public transport usage.
- **Policy Support:** Delhi's EV policy aligns with India's commitment to **reduce carbon intensity and achieve net-zero targets by 2070**.

Institutional Mechanisms & Multi-Level Governance

- **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):** A statutory body coordinating pollution control across Delhi-NCR, addressing inter-state pollution issues.
- **Local Governance – Vayu Rakshak Teams:** Ward-level teams ensure grassroots monitoring, community participation, and enforcement of pollution norms.
- **Inter-State Coordination:** Pollution sources like stubble burning require cooperation between Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and UP.
- **Accountability & Time-bound Targets:** Deadlines for landfill removal (e.g., Ghazipur by 2027) and emission monitoring systems enhance governance efficiency.

Environmental & Health Implications

- **Public Health Crisis:** Air pollution is linked to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular issues, and premature deaths; India accounts for a high global pollution burden.
- **Economic Costs:** Reduced productivity, increased healthcare expenditure, and environmental degradation impact economic growth.

- **Vulnerable Groups:** Children, elderly, and urban poor are disproportionately affected, highlighting the need for inclusive policies.
- **Climate Change Linkage:** Air pollutants like black carbon contribute to global warming, linking local pollution with global climate concerns.

Conclusion

Delhi's early action plan reflects a **shift from reactive to proactive governance** in tackling air pollution. However, sustained success requires **regional cooperation, strict enforcement, behavioural change, and long-term urban planning reforms**. A combination of **technology, policy, and citizen participation** is essential to ensure clean air as a fundamental right.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following are major sources of urban air pollution?

1. Vehicular emissions
2. Road dust
3. Industrial discharge
4. Biomass burning

Select the correct answer:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4
- (d) 2 and 4 only

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the role of technological interventions and governance reforms in addressing urban air pollution in India. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Forest Ecology & Conservation

Why in News: The Uttarakhand High Court recently stayed the felling of oak trees in Mussoorie, highlighting their ecological importance in the Himalayan ecosystem.

Key Details

- The High Court intervened in a civic construction project to prevent **oak tree felling in Mussoorie**.
- Oak forests are crucial for **water conservation, biodiversity, and local livelihoods** in the Himalayas.
- Studies indicate **forest degradation in Himalayan regions at ~0.36 sq km/year** due to anthropogenic pressures.
- Replacement of oak by species like chir pine is increasing **forest fires and ecological imbalance**.

Oak Forests as Keystone Ecosystems

- **Ecological Backbone of Himalayas:** Oaks (genus *Quercus*) dominate mid-altitude Himalayan forests (800–3000 m) and act as **keystone species**, supporting multiple ecological processes.
- **High Biodiversity Support:** Oak forests host rich flora like orchids, mosses, and shrubs, creating **multi-layered habitats** with high species richness across Himalayan districts.
- **Faunal Diversity:** Species such as Himalayan langurs, Asiatic black bears, and birds like jays depend on oak acorns and foliage for food and shelter.

- **Microbial and Soil Life:** These forests sustain insects, millipedes, and microorganisms, contributing to **nutrient cycling and soil fertility**.

Ecosystem Services Provided by Oak Forests

- **Water Conservation & Spring Recharge:** Oak forests enhance **groundwater recharge** by improving soil infiltration, crucial for Himalayan springs and rural water supply.
- **Soil Conservation:** Dense root systems prevent soil erosion on steep slopes, reducing risks of **landslides and land degradation**.
- **Climate Regulation:** Oaks contribute to **carbon sequestration** and maintain local microclimate, helping mitigate climate change impacts.
- **Livelihood Support:** Local communities depend on oak for **fodder, fuelwood, and minor forest produce**, making them socio-economically vital.

Himalayan Oak Diversity

- **Species Richness:** Around **35 species of oak** are found in the Indian Himalayan region, indicating high ecological diversity.
- **Important Species in Uttarakhand:** Includes **Banj oak, Moru oak, Kharsu oak, Rianj oak, and Phalyant oak**, each adapted to specific altitudes and climatic conditions.
- **Altitudinal Zonation:** Oaks grow between **800–3000 metres**, forming a key ecological belt between subtropical and alpine zones.
- **Indicator of Ecosystem Health:** Presence of oak forests indicates **stable and moisture-rich ecosystems**, unlike degraded pine-dominated areas.

Threats: Degradation and Anthropogenic Pressure

- **Deforestation & Development Projects:** Infrastructure expansion leads to **forest clearance**, disrupting fragile Himalayan ecosystems.
- **Over-exploitation:** Excessive lopping for fodder and fuelwood reduces canopy cover, affecting **natural regeneration and seed production**.
- **Forest Degradation Data:** Research indicates degradation at **~0.36 sq km/year**, reflecting cumulative impacts of human activity and climate stress.
- **Slow Regeneration:** Continuous disturbance prevents ecosystem recovery, leading to **long-term ecological imbalance**.

Invasive Species and Ecological Shift

- **Chir Pine Invasion:** Replacement of oak forests by chir pine alters ecosystem structure due to **competitive exclusion of native species**.
- **Impact on Biodiversity:** Pine forests support less biodiversity compared to oak, leading to **loss of ecological richness**.
- **Increased Forest Fires:** Chir pine is highly inflammable, increasing **frequency and intensity of forest fires** in Himalayan regions.
- **Pathogen Vulnerability:** Fire-damaged oaks become susceptible to diseases, causing **tree mortality and forest degradation**.

Legal and Policy Dimensions

- **Judicial Intervention:** The Uttarakhand High Court's stay reflects the role of judiciary in **environmental protection under Article 21 (Right to Life)**.

Western Disturbance & IMD Weather Warning

Why in News: India Meteorological Department has issued warnings regarding an **active Western Disturbance** likely to cause widespread rainfall, thunderstorms, hailstorms, and strong winds across Northwest, Central, and parts of East India during early April 2026.

Key Details

- An active **Western Disturbance** is expected to affect Northwest India between **2nd–5th April 2026**, with peak activity on **3rd and 4th April**.
- India Meteorological Department forecasted **isolated heavy rainfall over Kashmir Valley** and hailstorms across several northern states.
- Thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty winds are likely over **Central India till 6th April 2026**.
- Day temperatures are expected to remain **normal to below normal** over Northwest India till 6th April.
- The warnings include possible impacts on **agriculture, infrastructure, transportation, and public safety**.

Western Disturbance – Meaning & Origin

- **Western Disturbance (WD):** It is an **extra-tropical storm system** originating in the Mediterranean region and moving eastward towards India through the westerlies.
- **Nature of System:** It carries moisture from the Mediterranean, Caspian Sea, and Black Sea regions, causing winter and pre-monsoon rainfall over North India.
- **Trough & Cyclonic Circulation:** Western Disturbances are generally associated with upper-air cyclonic circulations and troughs in the mid-latitude westerlies.
- **Seasonality:** They are most active during winter and early spring, significantly influencing India's climate and agriculture.

Importance of Western Disturbances in India

Source of Winter Rainfall

- Western Disturbances provide crucial winter rainfall to North and Northwest India, especially Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.
- This rainfall is highly beneficial for **Rabi crops** such as wheat, mustard, and barley.

Snowfall in Himalayan Region

- They cause snowfall in the Himalayan states including Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.
- Snow accumulation supports glaciers, river systems, hydropower generation, and long-term water security.

Climate Moderation

- Western Disturbances reduce excessive heat over Northwest India by bringing cloud cover and precipitation.
- They help regulate seasonal temperature variations during transition months.

- **Forest Conservation Framework:** Oak forests are protected under laws like the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980** and policies promoting sustainable forest use.
- **Community Participation:** Initiatives like **Joint Forest Management (JFM)** encourage local involvement in forest conservation.
- **Climate Commitments:** Protecting oak forests aligns with India's **NDC targets under the Paris Agreement** for increasing forest cover.

Way Forward

- **Scientific Forest Management:** Promote **oak-based afforestation** instead of monoculture plantations like chir pine, using region-specific ecological planning and native species restoration.
- **Community-Based Conservation:** Strengthen initiatives like **Joint Forest Management (JFM)** by involving local communities in sustainable harvesting, protection, and regeneration of oak forests.
- **Regulating Developmental Activities:** Ensure strict **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** for infrastructure projects in Himalayan regions to minimise ecological damage and tree felling.
- **Control of Invasive Species:** Implement targeted programmes to **limit the spread of chir pine** and other invasive species that disrupt native biodiversity.
- **Fire Management Strategies:** Develop **early warning systems, fire lines, and community awareness programmes** to reduce forest fire risks, especially in pine-dominated areas.
- **Use of Technology:** Employ **remote sensing, GIS mapping, and forest monitoring tools** for real-time tracking of forest cover and degradation trends.
- **Policy Integration with Climate Goals:** Align oak forest conservation with India's **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** and long-term climate resilience strategies.

Conclusion

Oak forests are vital to the ecological stability, water security, and biodiversity of the Himalayan region. Their degradation due to anthropogenic pressures and ecological shifts poses serious environmental challenges. The recent judicial intervention highlights the urgent need to balance development with conservation. Protecting oak ecosystems is not merely an environmental necessity but a cornerstone for achieving sustainable development and climate resilience in India.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements about oak forests:

1. They enhance groundwater recharge.
2. They are more fire-resistant than chir pine forests.
3. They support higher biodiversity than pine forests.

Which of the above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: d

Colour Code	Alert	Warning	Impact	Suggested Actions
Green (No action)	Normal Day	Maximum temperatures are near normal	Comfortable temperature. No cautionary action required.	Nil
Yellow Alert (Be updated)	Heat Alert	Heat wave conditions at isolated pockets persists on 2 days	Moderate temperature. Heat is tolerable for general public but moderate health concern for vulnerable people e.g. infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases	(a) Avoid heat exposure. (b) Wear lightweight, light- coloured, loose, cotton clothes. (c) Cover your head: Use a cloth, hat or umbrella
Orange Alert (Be prepared)	Severe Heat Alert for the day	(i) Severe heat wave conditions persists for 2 days (ii) Through not severe, but heat wave persists for 4 days or more	High temperature. Increased likelihood of heat illness symptoms in people who are either exposed to sun for a prolonged period or doing heavy work. High health concern for vulnerable people e.g. infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases.	(b) Avoid heat exposure– keep cool. Avoid dehydration. (b) Drink sufficient water- even if not thirsty. (c) Use ORS, homemade drinks like lassi, torani (rice water), lemon water, buttermilk, etc. to keep yourself hydrated
Red Alert (Take Action)	Extreme Heat Alert for the day	(i) Severe heat wave persists for more than 2 days. (ii) Total number of heat/severe heat wave days exceeding 6 days.	Very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages.	Extreme care needed for vulnerable people.

Weather Systems Responsible for Current Event

Fresh Western Disturbance

- A cyclonic circulation over **East Iran and adjoining regions** has developed into an active Western Disturbance system.
- It is moving eastward under the influence of tropical westerlies and affecting weather over Northwest India.

Upper Air Cyclonic Circulation

- Multiple upper-air cyclonic circulations have formed over southeast Pakistan, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Assam.
- These systems enhance atmospheric instability and intensify thunderstorms and rainfall activity.

Trough Formation

- Troughs extending across Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra are aiding moisture convergence.
- This supports widespread thunderstorm and hailstorm activity over Central and Eastern India.

IMD Forecast for Northwest India

Rainfall & Snowfall Activity

- Scattered to widespread rainfall and snowfall are expected over Himalayan states during 3rd–5th April 2026.
- States like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh may witness moderate rainfall and thunderstorms.

Hailstorm Warning

- Hailstorm activity is likely over parts of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.
- Hailstorms can damage standing crops, orchards, power infrastructure, and vulnerable structures.

Thundersquall Conditions

- Strong winds reaching **50–70 kmph** may occur over parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- These winds increase risks of tree uprooting, infrastructure damage, and transportation disruption.

Weather Conditions over Central & Peninsular India

Central India

- States such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Vidarbha are likely to receive rainfall with thunderstorms.
- Hailstorm activity is expected over Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha till 3rd April.

Western India

- Maharashtra and Gujarat may witness thunderstorms accompanied by gusty winds.
- Marathwada and Madhya Maharashtra are under warning for squally winds and hailstorm activity.

South India

- Thunderstorms with lightning are likely over Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.
- Isolated hailstorm activity is expected over interior Karnataka regions.

Impact on Agriculture

Crop Damage Risk

- Hailstorms and heavy rainfall can severely damage standing crops, horticulture produce, and plantations.
- Crops like wheat, mustard, pulses, vegetables, and fruits are especially vulnerable during harvesting season.

Waterlogging & Soil Erosion

- Heavy rainfall may lead to waterlogging in low-lying agricultural fields and damage soil fertility.
- Excess moisture can negatively affect crop quality and storage conditions.

IMD Agromet Advisories

- Farmers have been advised to harvest matured crops immediately and store them safely.
- Use of hail nets, proper drainage systems, and crop protection measures has been recommended.

Disaster Management & Public Safety

Urban Flooding & Infrastructure Stress

- Localised flooding and waterlogging may disrupt transport systems and urban mobility.
- Strong winds can damage power lines, communication systems, and temporary structures.

Landslide Risk

- Hilly regions of the Himalayas are vulnerable to landslides and mudslides due to heavy rainfall and snowfall.
- This poses risks to roads, tourism, and border connectivity.

Lightning Hazard

- Lightning remains one of India's leading weather-related causes of deaths during thunderstorms.
- People are advised to avoid open fields, water bodies, and isolated trees during storm activity.

Role of India Meteorological Department (IMD)

Nodal Weather Forecasting Agency

India Meteorological Department functions under the Ministry of Earth Sciences and serves as India's primary weather forecasting agency.

- It issues early warnings for cyclones, heat waves, rainfall, and extreme weather events.
- IMD supports disaster preparedness, aviation, agriculture, and maritime activities through weather advisories.

Climate Change & Extreme Weather Events

Increasing Weather Variability

- Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as thunderstorms, hailstorms, and unseasonal rainfall.
- Warmer atmospheric conditions enhance moisture retention and instability, intensifying severe weather systems.

Agricultural Vulnerability

- India's agriculture remains highly climate-sensitive, especially due to dependence on seasonal weather patterns.
- Unpredictable rainfall and temperature fluctuations threaten food security and farmer livelihoods.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Early Warning Systems:** Improve weather forecasting accuracy and dissemination at district level.
- **Promote Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Encourage crop insurance, resilient seeds, and adaptive farming practices.
- **Improve Urban Drainage Infrastructure:** Prevent urban flooding and waterlogging during heavy rainfall events.
- **Enhance Disaster Preparedness:** Strengthen coordination between IMD, NDMA, and state agencies for timely response.

- **Increase Public Awareness:** Promote lightning safety, weather literacy, and emergency preparedness measures.

Conclusion

The recent Western Disturbance highlights the increasing importance of accurate weather forecasting and disaster preparedness in India. While such systems are crucial for winter rainfall and agriculture, their growing intensity due to climate variability also creates risks for infrastructure, livelihoods, and public safety. Strengthening climate resilience and early warning systems remains essential for sustainable development and disaster risk reduction.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Western Disturbances originate primarily in which region?

- (a) Arabian Sea
- (b) Bay of Bengal
- (c) Mediterranean Region
- (d) South China Sea

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of Western Disturbances in India's climate and agriculture. How can India improve resilience against extreme weather events associated with them? (150 Words, 10 Marks)

India Withdraws COP33 UNFCCC Host Bid

Why in News: India has withdrawn its bid to host the **33rd Conference of Parties (COP33)** under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2028, citing a review of its commitments for that year. The move has triggered debate regarding India's climate diplomacy and leadership role within the Global South.

Key Details

- India withdrew its candidature to host **COP33 (2028)** under the UNFCCC framework.
- Analysts link the withdrawal to logistical burdens, competing global events, and concerns over pressure for stronger climate commitments.
- After Australia and Turkey hosting COP31 (2026), and Ethiopia hosting COP32 (2027), South Korea remains the major contender for COP33.
- India had previously hosted **COP8 in 2002**.
- In 2026, India updated its **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** with stronger renewable energy and emissions intensity targets.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Meaning & Objective

- The **UNFCCC** is the primary international treaty aimed at preventing dangerous human interference with the climate system. It provides the global framework for climate negotiations and cooperation among nations.
- Adopted during the **1992 Rio Earth Summit** and operational since 1994, the Convention seeks to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations while ensuring sustainable economic development and food security.

Core Principles of UNFCCC

Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC)

- The principle of **CBDR-RC** recognises that all countries share responsibility for addressing climate change, but developed countries bear greater historical responsibility for emissions.
- It also acknowledges differences in technological capability, financial resources, and developmental priorities between developed and developing nations.

Sustainable Development Principle

- The UNFCCC promotes climate action that balances environmental protection with economic development. It emphasises that climate policies should not compromise poverty alleviation and growth in developing countries.
- This principle is particularly important for countries like India that face developmental and energy access challenges.

Institutional Structure of UNFCCC

Conference of Parties (COP)

- The **Conference of Parties (COP)** is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC and meets annually to review progress in climate negotiations and implementation.
- COP meetings serve as global platforms for negotiations on emissions reduction, climate finance, adaptation, and technology transfer.

UNFCCC Secretariat

- The Secretariat, headquartered in Bonn, facilitates climate negotiations, data analysis, and coordination among member nations.
- It also supports implementation of agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement.

Transparency & Reporting Mechanism

- Member countries regularly submit **National Communications** and **Biennial Transparency Reports** regarding greenhouse gas emissions and climate actions.
- This mechanism improves accountability and helps track global progress toward climate goals.

Financial Mechanisms under UNFCCC

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

- The **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** is the world's largest dedicated climate fund supporting mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries.
- As of 2026, it has financed over 350 projects globally with commitments exceeding **USD 20 billion**.

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

- The **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** provides financial assistance for environmental protection and clean energy transition projects.
- It often acts as seed funding for large-scale climate and biodiversity programmes.

Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)

- The **Loss and Damage Fund** assists vulnerable countries affected by climate disasters such as floods, cyclones, droughts, and sea-level rise.
- It reflects growing recognition of climate justice and compensation concerns raised by developing nations.

Adaptation Fund

- The Adaptation Fund finances projects that enhance resilience against climate impacts, including drought-

resistant agriculture, coastal protection, and water management.

- It is particularly significant for climate-vulnerable developing countries.

Major Legal Instruments under UNFCCC

Kyoto Protocol (1997)

- The Kyoto Protocol imposed legally binding emissions reduction targets primarily on developed countries.
- It operationalised the principle of CBDR-RC but faced criticism due to limited participation and enforcement challenges.

Paris Agreement (2015)

- The Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to **well below 2°C**, preferably **1.5°C**, above pre-industrial levels.
- It introduced the system of **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** where countries voluntarily commit climate targets.

Global Stocktake (GST)

Meaning & Importance

- The **Global Stocktake (GST)** is a periodic assessment mechanism under the Paris Agreement to evaluate collective progress toward climate goals.
- The first GST concluded in 2023, while the second is scheduled for 2028, making COP33 strategically significant for future climate ambition reviews.

India's Climate Commitments

Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

- In March 2026, India announced updated NDCs committing to source **60% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2035**.
- India also pledged to reduce emissions intensity of GDP by **47%** and enhance carbon sinks by **3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent**.

India's Climate Leadership

- India has positioned itself as a major voice of the **Global South**, advocating climate justice, equity, and climate finance for developing nations.
- Initiatives such as the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and emphasis on sustainable lifestyles strengthen India's climate diplomacy.

Reasons Behind India's Withdrawal from COP33 Bid

Logistical & Administrative Burden

- Hosting a COP involves extensive logistical arrangements, financial expenditure, and diplomatic coordination.
- Analysts believe India may be avoiding overlap with other large international commitments and events.

Pressure for Higher Climate Ambition

- Hosting COP often increases pressure on countries to announce stronger climate commitments and ambitious emissions targets.
- India may seek policy flexibility while balancing developmental and energy security priorities.

Strategic Climate Negotiation Concerns

- India has consistently emphasised equity and climate finance responsibilities of developed nations.
- Avoiding the host role may help India maintain a stronger negotiating posture without additional diplomatic obligations.

Significance for Global Climate Politics

Impact on Global South Leadership

- India's withdrawal may affect perceptions of its leadership role among developing countries seeking stronger climate finance and equity-based negotiations.
- As one of the largest emerging economies, India plays a crucial role in shaping climate governance debates.

Asia-Pacific Representation

- COP hosting rotates among UN regional groups. India's withdrawal leaves South Korea as the primary Asia-Pacific candidate for COP33.
- This may shift regional climate diplomacy dynamics within Asia.

Challenges in Global Climate Governance

Climate Finance Gap

- Developing countries continue to face inadequate climate finance despite commitments made by developed nations.
- The unmet USD 100 billion annual climate finance target remains a major concern under UNFCCC negotiations.

Balancing Development & Decarbonisation

- Developing economies like India must balance industrial growth, poverty alleviation, and energy access alongside emissions reduction commitments.
- This creates tensions between developmental priorities and global decarbonisation expectations.

Way Forward

Strengthen Climate Diplomacy

- India should continue leading Global South concerns on climate justice, adaptation finance, and equitable carbon space.
- Constructive engagement in future COP negotiations remains essential.

Accelerate Green Transition

- Expansion of renewable energy, green hydrogen, electric mobility, and sustainable infrastructure can strengthen India's climate credibility.
- Reducing dependence on fossil fuels will improve long-term energy security and environmental sustainability.

Focus on Climate Resilience

- India must prioritise adaptation strategies for vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, water resources, and coastal regions.
- Climate-resilient infrastructure and disaster preparedness are crucial for sustainable development.

Conclusion

India's withdrawal from the COP33 hosting race reflects the complex intersection of climate diplomacy, developmental priorities, and strategic negotiations under the UNFCCC framework. While the decision may raise questions regarding leadership optics, India continues to remain a central actor in global climate governance through its renewable energy transition, advocacy for climate justice, and commitment to sustainable development.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which principle under the UNFCCC recognises that developed countries bear greater historical responsibility for climate change?

- (a) Polluter Pays Principle
- (b) Precautionary Principle

- (c) Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC)
- (d) Intergenerational Equity

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of the UNFCCC framework in global climate governance and examine India's role in climate negotiations. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme

Why in News: The Ministry of Jal Shakti has extended the **River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme** for the **16th Finance Commission period (2026–27 to 2030–31)**, reflecting India's emphasis on integrated, sustainable, and basin-level water resource management.

Key Details

- The **River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme** is a **Central Sector Scheme** implemented by the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.
- The scheme focuses on **integrated planning and sustainable management** of rivers, tributaries, lakes, and groundwater at the basin level.
- It includes major institutions such as the **Brahmaputra Board**, Central Water Commission (CWC), and National Water Development Agency (NWDA).
- The scheme prioritises ecologically and strategically important river basins such as the **Brahmaputra, Barak, Teesta, and Indus basins**.
- The extension aims to improve **flood management, irrigation planning, hydropower development, and ecological sustainability**.

River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme – Meaning & Importance

- **Integrated Water Resource Management:** The RBM Scheme treats an entire river basin as a single interconnected hydrological unit rather than managing rivers and groundwater separately. This helps ensure coordinated planning of water resources.
- **Sustainable Development Approach:** The scheme promotes balanced utilisation of surface water, groundwater, ecological systems, and human needs to ensure long-term water security.
- **Scientific Basin-Level Planning:** River basins are considered the most suitable hydrological unit for water planning because all tributaries, drainage channels, and groundwater systems are interconnected.
- **Climate Resilience:** Integrated basin management improves resilience against floods, droughts, erosion, and climate-induced water stress.

Institutional Framework of RBM Scheme

Brahmaputra Board

- The **Brahmaputra Board** focuses on flood control, erosion management, drainage development, and sustainable river basin planning in the North Eastern Region.
- It plays a critical role in protecting ecologically sensitive and flood-prone regions such as **Majuli Island in Assam**, which faces severe riverbank erosion.

Central Water Commission (CWC)

Central Water Commission is responsible for technical surveys, hydrological investigations, and preparation of **Detailed Project Reports (DPRs)** for water resource projects.

- It supports irrigation development, flood management, and hydropower planning in remote and difficult terrains, especially Himalayan regions.

National Water Development Agency (NWDA)

National Water Development Agency handles national-level water planning and feasibility studies for the **Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) Programme**.

- It aims to address regional water imbalances by transferring water from surplus river basins to deficit regions.

Geographical Focus of the RBM Scheme

Strategic River Basins

The scheme gives priority to:

- Brahmaputra Basin
- Barak Basin
- Teesta Basin
- Indus Basin

These regions are strategically important due to their role in water security, border management, ecological balance, and flood control.

Focus on North-East & Himalayan Regions

- The scheme particularly targets the North Eastern States, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh due to their fragile ecosystems and complex river systems.
- These regions also have significant hydropower potential and geopolitical importance because many rivers are transboundary in nature.



Key Objectives of the RBM Scheme

Flood & Erosion Management

- The scheme undertakes flood moderation and erosion control measures to protect vulnerable populations and agricultural land.
- Riverbank protection and drainage improvement projects are especially important in flood-prone states like Assam.

Irrigation & Hydropower Development

- Preparation of DPRs supports expansion of irrigation networks and hydropower generation projects.
- Himalayan rivers possess immense untapped hydropower potential crucial for India's renewable energy transition.

Technological Integration

- The RBM Scheme uses advanced technologies such as **Geographical Information Systems (GIS), LiDAR mapping, satellite imagery, and drone surveys**.
- These technologies improve topographical accuracy, hydrological assessment, and disaster preparedness.

Community Participation

- The scheme promotes local water conservation practices such as **springshed management** among tribal and rural communities.
- Community participation ensures sustainable utilisation of water resources and strengthens grassroots water governance.

River Basin – Meaning & Features

Meaning of River Basin

- A river basin refers to the entire area drained by a river and its tributaries. It acts as a single hydrological unit for water resource planning and management.
- It includes rivers, streams, lakes, groundwater systems, and surrounding catchment areas connected through natural drainage patterns.

Key Features of a River Basin

Tributaries

- Smaller rivers or streams that join the main river are called tributaries. They contribute water and sediments to the main channel.

Confluence

- The meeting point of two rivers is known as a confluence. These locations often hold geographical, ecological, and cultural significance.

Watershed

- A watershed is the elevated boundary separating two drainage basins. It determines the direction of surface water flow.

Source & Mouth

- The source is the origin point of a river, while the mouth is where the river drains into a sea, lake, or another river.
- The flow from source to mouth shapes regional ecology, agriculture, and settlements.

River Basins of India

Classification of River Basins

India's drainage system is divided into **20 river basin groups**, including:

- 12 Major River Basins
- 8 Composite River Basins

Major River Basins

Major basins have drainage areas exceeding **20,000 sq km** and include:

- Ganga–Brahmaputra–Meghna
- Indus
- Godavari
- Krishna
- Cauvery
- Mahanadi
- Narmada
- Tapti
- Sabarmati
- Mahi
- Pennar
- Brahmani–Baitarani

Ganga–Brahmaputra–Meghna Basin

- The **Ganga–Brahmaputra–Meghna Basin** is India's largest river basin with a catchment area of nearly **11 lakh sq km**.
- It accounts for more than **43% of the total catchment area** of India's major rivers and supports a large population and agricultural economy.

Composite River Basins

- Composite basins combine smaller river systems and coastal rivers, especially in western and southern India.
- Examples include rivers of Kutch and Saurashtra, Subarnarekha group, and coastal rivers flowing into the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Importance of River Basin Management in India

Water Security

- Integrated basin management ensures efficient allocation and sustainable use of scarce freshwater resources.
- It is critical for addressing growing water stress caused by population growth, urbanisation, and climate change.

Disaster Management

- River basin planning improves preparedness against floods, droughts, and riverbank erosion.
- It strengthens climate adaptation and disaster resilience in vulnerable regions.

Ecological Sustainability

- River basins support biodiversity, wetlands, forests, fisheries, and groundwater recharge systems.
- Sustainable basin management helps maintain ecological balance and environmental flows.

Inter-State Coordination

- Most major river basins in India are inter-state in nature, covering nearly **81% of India's geographical area**.
- Basin-level governance improves coordination among states and reduces water-sharing conflicts.

Challenges in River Basin Management

- Inter-state river water disputes and competing water demands.
- Pollution from industries, agriculture, and urban settlements.
- Over-extraction of groundwater and declining river flows.
- Climate change increasing frequency of floods and droughts.
- Institutional fragmentation among multiple agencies managing water resources.

Way Forward

- **Integrated River Basin Governance:** Strengthen coordination among states and water management agencies.
- **Technology-Driven Planning:** Expand use of GIS, satellite monitoring, and real-time hydrological systems.
- **Community Participation:** Encourage local water conservation and participatory watershed management.
- **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** Develop sustainable flood-control and drought-management systems.
- **Ecological Restoration:** Protect wetlands, recharge zones, and river ecosystems through scientific planning.

Conclusion

The **River Basin Management (RBM) Scheme** represents a shift toward integrated and sustainable water governance in India. By treating river basins as interconnected ecological and hydrological systems, the scheme aims to strengthen water security, disaster resilience, and environmental sustainability. Effective implementation will be crucial for balancing developmental needs with ecological conservation in the era of climate change.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following organisations is primarily responsible for preparing feasibility reports under the Interlinking of Rivers Programme?

- (a) Central Ground Water Board
- (b) National Water Development Agency
- (c) National Mission for Clean Ganga
- (d) Central Pollution Control Board

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of river basin management in ensuring sustainable water resource governance in India. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE CONSERVATION ON HOPE ISLAND

Safeguarding a Key Marine Species and Its Habitats



WHY IN NEWS?

Nearly 20,000 Olive Ridley turtle eggs have been conserved on Hope Island in Kakinada Bay, Andhra Pradesh by the Wildlife Management Authority and Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary using the *in-situ* conservation method.

HOPE ISLAND – A SAFE NESTING GROUND



- Located in Kakinada Bay, Andhra Pradesh
- Important rookery for Olive Ridley turtles
- Eggs are protected through *in-situ* conservation

OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES: KEY FACTS



ABOUT THE SPECIES

- World's smallest sea turtle
- Heart-shaped, olive or grayish-green carapace
- Found in tropical regions of the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans
- Inhabit both open ocean and coastal waters



DIET & BEHAVIOR

- Omnivorous: feed on jellyfish, snails, crabs and algae
- Undertake long-distance migrations from Pacific to Indian Ocean
- **Arribada**: mass nesting on narrow, sandy beaches near estuaries & bays
- Each female lays about 100–140 eggs

MAJOR NESTING SITES IN INDIA



LEGAL PROTECTION STATUS

- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
- CITES Convention: Appendix I
- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- All 5 species of sea turtles in India are fully protected



CONSERVATION MEASURES



Operation Olivia: Indian Coast Guard enforces fishing bans during nesting season.



Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) are mandated in Odisha to reduce bycatch.



Tagging & Monitoring: Satellite tagging helps track migration routes and behavior.



Community Participation: Local communities and forest/wildlife departments involved in protection and awareness.



MAJOR THREATS



Illegal poaching and egg trade despite international ban.



Accidental bycatch in trawl and gill nets – the biggest cause of mortality.



Marine pollution and habitat degradation threaten nesting beaches.



Artificial lighting disturbs nesting females and hatchlings.



Climate change and rising sea levels affect nesting habitats.



SIGNIFICANCE

Conserving Olive Ridley turtles helps maintain marine biodiversity, supports healthy coastal ecosystems, and sustains the livelihoods of coastal communities.

DID YOU KNOW?

The mass nesting event of Olive Ridleys, called "Arribada", is one of the most spectacular wildlife phenomena in the world.



QUICK FACTS

- **Scientific Name:** *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- **Class:** Reptilia • **Family:** Cheloniidae
- **Lifespan:** 50 – 60 years (approx.)
- **Size:** 60 – 70 cm (curved carapace)



Conservation today ensures survival tomorrow.

#SAVE TURTLES #SAVE OCEANS

FIREFLIES LATEST NEWS

Two New Species Discovered in Meghalaya



WHY IN NEWS?

Scientists recently discovered two previously unknown species of fireflies—*Diaphanes meghalayanus* and *Diaphanes mawlynnong*—in Meghalaya’s East Khasi Hills. This marks the first formal documentation of fireflies from the state.



ABOUT THE NEW SPECIES



Diaphanes meghalayanus



- Named after Meghalaya, indicating its broader distribution in the region.
- Found in semi-evergreen forests and dense betel nut plantations with bamboo patches.
- Typically observed during February.
- Thrives in cool, humid conditions (18–20°C temperature and 77–80% humidity).
- Flies at heights of 10–15 metres, glowing softly in the dark.

Diaphanes mawlynnong

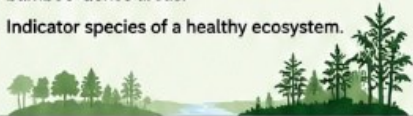


- Named after Mawlynnong village, where it was first recorded.
- Acknowledges the local Khasi community.
- Habitat-specific: lives in dense forests with thick bamboo growth and rocky streams.
- Males observed flying about 15 metres above the ground.
- Wingless female found beneath a boulder—unique behaviour offering rare insight into its life cycle.
- Females emit a slower, longer pulsating glow compared to males.



HABITAT & ECOLOGY

- Both species thrive in dark, humid environments with minimal human interference.
- They prefer undisturbed forests, streams, and bamboo-dense areas.
- Indicator species of a healthy ecosystem.



UNIQUE OBSERVATIONS

Diaphanes meghalayanus

- Active flyers.
- Sighted at heights 10–15 metres.
- Soft, rhythmic glow used for communication.

Diaphanes mawlynnong

- Male:** Active flier about 15 metres high.
- Female:** Wingless; found beneath boulder.
- Distinct slower, longer pulsating glow.



ABOUT FIREFLIES

- Family: Lampyridae
- Worldwide distribution except Antarctica.
- Produce light (bioluminescence) using a chemical reaction in their abdomen.
- Light is used for communication, mating, and warning.
- Highly sensitive to habitat disturbance and pollution.



ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

- Natural predators of small insects and pests.
- Indicators of forest health and environmental quality.
- Aid in pollination and nutrient balance in ecosystems.
- Loss of fireflies signals ecosystem degradation.



CONSERVATION MESSAGE

- Protect forest habitats, streams, and wetlands.
- Reduce light pollution and chemical use.
- Support community awareness and citizen science.
- Conserving fireflies means conserving biodiversity.



QUICK FACTS

- Order: Coleoptera
- Known Firefly Species Globally: ~2,000+



India: ~60–70 species recorded so far



Habitat: Forests, grasslands, wetlands, agricultural landscapes



Conservation Status: Many species not yet assessed; several face threats



Threats: Habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, light pollution



LET'S PROTECT FIREFLIES TODAY FOR A BRIGHTER, HEALTHIER TOMORROW!



KUGTI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

A High-Altitude Biodiversity Treasure of Himachal Pradesh



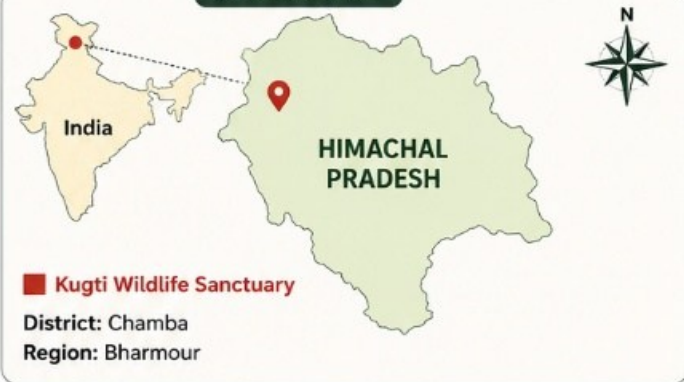
LATEST NEWS

A rare white female albino Himalayan 'tahr' has been recorded in the Kugti Wildlife Sanctuary at Bharmour in Chamba district.

ABOUT KUGTI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

- It is the second largest sanctuary located in Himachal Pradesh.
- It houses the famous **Manimahesh temple**, an attraction to thousands of pilgrims despite the difficult terrain and extreme cold conditions.
- It lies between the **Ravi and Chenab rivers**.
- Surrounded by **Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary (South-East)** and **Tundah Wildlife Sanctuary (North-West)**.
- **Altitudinal range: 2,195 m to 5,040 m** above sea level.

LOCATION MAP



VEGETATION

- Alpine Pasture
- Western Mixed Coniferous Forest
- Moist Deodar Forest



FAUNA (KEY SPECIES)



Ibex



Musk Deer



Monal Snow Cock



Pheasants



Himalayan Tahr



Red-vented Bulbul

FLORA (MAJOR SPECIES)



Deodara (Cedrus deodara)



Kail (Pinus wallichiana)



Spruce (Picea smithiana)



Silver Fir (Abies pindrow)



Ban (Quercus semicarpifolia)



Pink Burans (Rhododendron campanulatum)

SIGNIFICANCE

- Conserves rich biodiversity of the Western Himalayas.
- Protects rare and endangered species.
- Supports ecological balance of Ravi-Chenab basin.
- Important for scientific research and eco-tourism.



Protecting Kugti today ensures a healthier Himalaya for tomorrow.



SAVE WILDLIFE
SAVE NATURE

Challenge of Affordable Cancer Care in India

Why in News: An investigation has highlighted **rising use, high cost, and counterfeit risks of Keytruda (a cancer immunotherapy drug) in India**, raising concerns about access and regulation.

Key Details

- **Keytruda** is an immunotherapy drug used in treating various cancers by boosting the immune system.
- It belongs to **monoclonal antibody-based therapies**, offering targeted treatment with fewer side effects than chemotherapy.
- High cost (₹3 lakh/month approx.) and **limited insurance coverage** restrict accessibility in India.
- Investigation reveals **counterfeit drug circulation**, exposing regulatory and hospital-level gaps.

Cancer Burden in India

- **Rising Incidence:** India recorded about **14.1 lakh cancer cases in 2022**, projected to rise by **~73% to 24.5 lakh by 2045 (GLOBOCAN)**, indicating a growing public health challenge.
- **Increasing Rate:** Cancer incidence increased from **84.8 per 100,000 (1990) to ~107 per 100,000 (2023)**, reflecting lifestyle changes, ageing population, and environmental factors.
- **Comparative Perspective:** While India's incidence (~98.5 per 100,000) is lower than developed countries like Australia (~462 per 100,000), the **absolute burden is high due to population size**.
- **Mortality Concerns:** High mortality (over **9 lakh deaths annually**) reflects late diagnosis, poor access to treatment, and affordability issues.

Immunotherapy: Concept and Advantages

- **Definition:** Immunotherapy refers to treatments that **stimulate the body's immune system** to recognise and destroy cancer cells, unlike traditional therapies.
- **Difference from Chemotherapy/Radiotherapy:** While chemotherapy kills both healthy and cancer cells, immunotherapy is **targeted**, reducing collateral damage and improving quality of life.
- **Effectiveness in Advanced Cancers:** Studies show immunotherapy can **extend survival and even eliminate tumours** in certain late-stage cancers, marking a paradigm shift in oncology.
- **Precision Medicine Approach:** It aligns with the concept of **personalised medicine**, where treatment is tailored based on genetic and molecular characteristics.

Keytruda and Monoclonal Antibodies

- **Mechanism of Action:** Keytruda (Pembrolizumab) is a **PD-1 inhibitor**, a monoclonal antibody that blocks immune checkpoints, enabling immune cells to attack cancer.
- **Targeted Therapy:** It specifically binds to cancer-related proteins, making treatment **highly precise and efficient** compared to conventional therapies.

- **Global Significance:** Widely used in treating cancers like **lung cancer, melanoma, and head & neck cancers**, it represents a breakthrough in modern medicine.
- **High Manufacturing Complexity:** Unlike simple drugs (e.g., Paracetamol), monoclonal antibodies require **advanced biotechnology**, increasing production costs.

Other Emerging Immunotherapies

- **CAR-T Cell Therapy:** Patient's T-cells are genetically modified to attack cancer cells. India's indigenous therapy **NexCAR19** reflects progress in biotech innovation.
- **mRNA Cancer Vaccines:** These vaccines train the immune system to identify **neoantigens**, helping prevent relapse and offering long-term immunity.
- **Combination Therapies:** Immunotherapy is often used along with **chemotherapy and radiotherapy**, improving overall treatment outcomes.
- **Global Research Trends:** Rapid advancements in **genomics and biotechnology** are making immunotherapy a key pillar of future cancer treatment.

Accessibility and Affordability Issues in India

- **High-Cost Barrier:** Keytruda costs around **₹3 lakh per month**, making it unaffordable for most patients without insurance or assistance.
- **Limited Insurance Coverage:** General health insurance provides **partial coverage**, while specialised cancer policies are not widely accessible.
- **Patient Access Programme:** Pharmaceutical companies offer schemes (e.g., free vials after initial purchase), but eligibility restrictions limit reach.
- **Public Health Schemes:** Some support is available under schemes like **CGHS**, but coverage remains inadequate compared to demand.

Patent, Pricing and Market Dynamics

- **Patent Protection:** High prices are largely due to **patent monopolies**, limiting competition and keeping drug costs elevated.
- **Expected Price Reduction:** Keytruda's patent expiry in **2028** may reduce prices by up to **70%** due to generic entry.
- **Government Intervention:** India has removed **basic customs duty** on certain cancer drugs to improve affordability.
- **Global Inequality:** Access to life-saving therapies remains uneven, highlighting disparities between developed and developing countries.

Counterfeit Drug Issue and Regulatory Gaps

- **Fake Drug Market:** Investigation reveals a **growing counterfeit market** for expensive cancer drugs like Keytruda.
- **Systemic Failures:** Issues include **hospital-level breaches, insider involvement, and weak supply chain monitoring**.
- **Patient Risk:** Counterfeit drugs can lead to **treatment failure, health complications, and loss of trust in healthcare systems**.

- **Regulatory Challenges:** India faces gaps in **drug traceability, enforcement, and quality control mechanisms.**



Health Governance and Ethical Concerns

- **Right to Health:** High cost of life-saving drugs raises concerns about **equity and access**, central to Article 21 (Right to Life).
- **Public vs Private Healthcare:** Dependence on private sector for advanced therapies increases **out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE)**.
- **Ethical Issues:** Profit-driven pricing of essential medicines raises questions about **pharmaceutical ethics and global justice**.
- **Need for Regulation:** Stronger oversight is required to balance **innovation incentives and public health needs**.

Conclusion

India must adopt a **multi-pronged approach** to address cancer care challenges. This includes promoting **generic drug production, strengthening regulatory mechanisms, expanding insurance coverage, and investing in public healthcare infrastructure**. Enhancing **drug traceability systems** and encouraging **domestic innovation** in immunotherapy can improve accessibility. Ultimately, ensuring affordable and safe cancer treatment is essential for achieving **universal health coverage and equitable healthcare delivery**.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Keytruda is associated with:

- Antibiotic therapy
- Monoclonal antibody-based cancer treatment
- Vaccine for viral diseases
- Hormonal therapy

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Examine the regulatory and ethical issues associated with high-cost life-saving drugs in India. Suggest measures to ensure equitable healthcare access. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Lunar Exploration & Space Economy

Why in News: The NASA has unveiled a roadmap for sustained lunar presence alongside the upcoming Artemis II mission, signalling a new phase of space exploration.

Key Details

- Artemis II will send **four astronauts around the Moon**, marking the first human lunar mission since the Apollo Program era.
- NASA aims to establish a **permanent human base on the Moon** for long-term stays.
- The Moon is being developed as a **launchpad for deeper space missions**, including Mars.
- Increasing participation of countries like India, China, and Japan indicates a **multipolar space race**.

Artemis Programme & Evolution of Lunar Missions

- **Shift from Exploration to Sustainability:** Unlike Apollo missions focused on symbolic landings, the Artemis programme aims for **long-term human presence**, marking a transition from exploration to habitation.
- **Phased Mission Architecture:** Artemis I tested systems successfully, while Artemis II will carry astronauts around the Moon, followed by **human landing missions planned around 2028**.
- **Return After Five Decades:** The last human Moon mission was **Apollo 17 in 1972**, indicating a major technological and strategic revival after more than 50 years.
- **Integration of Public-Private Partnerships:** NASA is increasingly relying on **private players like SpaceX and international collaborations**, reflecting the commercialization of space.

Strategic Importance of the Moon

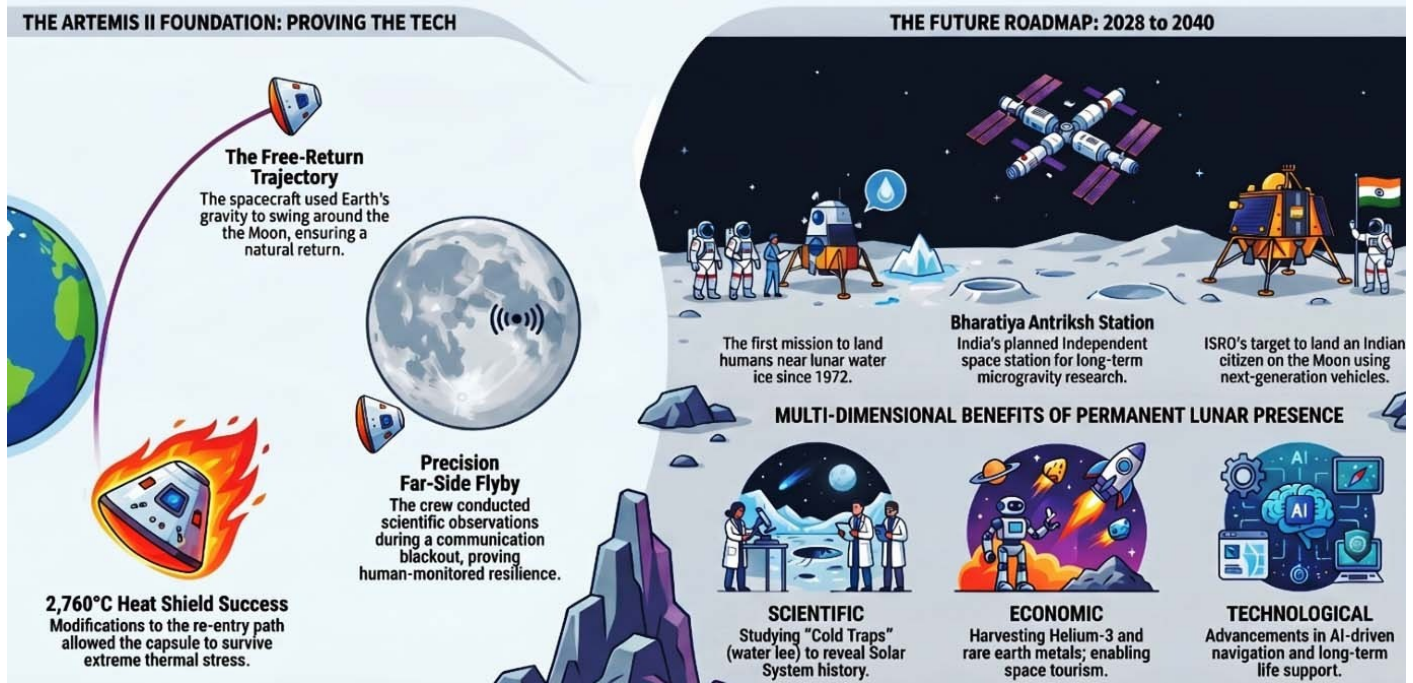
- **Gateway to Deep Space Exploration:** The Moon serves as a **testing ground for technologies** required for Mars missions, including life support systems and long-duration space travel.
- **In-Situ Resource Utilisation (ISRU):** Lunar resources like **water ice (for oxygen and fuel)** can enable sustainable missions, reducing dependence on Earth-based supplies.
- **Scientific Research Potential:** The Moon provides insights into the **early solar system**, geological evolution, and space weathering processes.
- **Geopolitical Significance:** Establishing a lunar base enhances **strategic dominance in space**, similar to how maritime dominance shaped global power.

Permanent Lunar Base & Space Infrastructure

- **Concept of Lunar Habitat:** NASA plans a **permanent base similar to the International Space Station**, enabling continuous human presence.
- **Regular Missions & Logistics:** Missions are planned at **six-month intervals**, carrying astronauts, fuel, and equipment, ensuring sustained operations.
- **Technological Requirements:** Challenges include **radiation protection, temperature extremes (-173°C to 127°C), and microgravity adaptation**, requiring advanced engineering solutions.
- **Use of Nuclear Energy:** NASA's plans for **nuclear-powered propulsion (e.g., Space Reactor-1)** could significantly enhance efficiency for interplanetary missions.

Artemis & Beyond: The Roadmap to a Sustainable Lunar Presence

Transitioning from short-term visits to a permanent deep-space presence, highlighting Artemis II successes and future global and Indian lunar exploration goals through 2040.



Changing Global Space Landscape

- **From Bipolar to Multipolar Competition:** Unlike the US-Soviet rivalry of the Cold War, space exploration now includes **multiple actors like India, China, Japan, and private companies.**
- **India's Growing Role:** ISRO has emerged as a key player with missions like Chandrayaan-3 and plans for human spaceflight (Gaganyaan).
- **Rise of Space Economy:** The global space economy is projected to exceed **\$1 trillion by 2040**, driven by satellite services, exploration, and commercialization.
- **International Collaboration:** Initiatives like the **Artemis Accords** promote peaceful use of space, resource sharing, and global cooperation.

Challenges and Concerns in Lunar Exploration

- **High Costs and Sustainability:** Space missions involve **massive financial investments**, raising concerns about economic feasibility for developing countries.
- **Space Governance Issues:** Existing frameworks like the **Outer Space Treaty (1967)** lack clarity on resource exploitation and property rights.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Increasing missions may lead to **space debris and ecological disturbance** on celestial bodies.
- **Technological and Human Risks:** Long-duration missions pose risks such as **radiation exposure, psychological stress, and system failures.**

India's Role & Future Opportunities

- India joined the Artemis Accords in 2023.
- Commits to **peaceful, transparent, and cooperative space use.**
- India's Gaganyaan is progressing.
- Plans include **building a space station and Moon mission by 2040.**
- Opportunities:
 - Contribute **payloads and experiments**
 - Collaborate on **joint missions**

- Participate in **lunar development under global frameworks**

Conclusion

The Artemis programme signifies a shift from symbolic exploration to **sustained human presence in space**, positioning the Moon as a gateway to Mars and beyond. For India, this presents opportunities to strengthen its space capabilities, enhance international cooperation, and leverage the emerging space economy. A balanced approach focusing on **innovation, sustainability, and global governance** will be crucial in shaping the future of space exploration.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following statements about the Artemis programme is correct?

- It aims only at robotic exploration of the Moon
- It seeks to establish long-term human presence on the Moon
- It is a joint mission of NASA and Roscosmos only
- It replaces the International Space Station

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. "The Artemis programme marks a paradigm shift from exploration to habitation in space." Discuss its significance for global space geopolitics and India. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Six Sigma Standards & Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)

Why in News: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology directed electronics manufacturers to adopt **Six Sigma standards** and strengthen domestic design capabilities, warning that benefits under the **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)** may be withheld for non-compliance.

Key Details

- **Six Sigma** is a globally recognised quality management methodology targeting only **3.4 defects per million opportunities (DPMO)**.
- The government has linked **ECMS incentives** with adoption of global manufacturing quality standards and domestic design capability.
- The **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)** was launched in 2025 with an initial outlay of **₹22,919 crore**, later increased to **₹40,000 crore** in Budget 2026–27.
- As of 2026, around **75 projects worth ₹61,000 crore** have been approved under ECMS.
- The scheme aims to support India's target of creating a **USD 500 billion electronics manufacturing ecosystem by 2030–31**.



Six Sigma Standards – Meaning & Significance

- **Meaning of Six Sigma:** Six Sigma is a **data-driven quality management methodology** aimed at minimising defects and improving manufacturing precision.
- **Target Standard:** It seeks near-perfect production by limiting defects to **3.4 defects per million opportunities (DPMO)**.
- **Origin:** Developed initially by Motorola and later popularised globally by General Electric.
- **Core Principle:** It focuses on process improvement, statistical quality control, efficiency, and reduction of wastage.

Importance of Six Sigma in Electronics Manufacturing

- **Global Supply Chain Requirement:** International technology companies prefer vendors with Six Sigma-certified manufacturing standards.
- **Precision Manufacturing:** Electronics manufacturing requires extremely high accuracy due to sensitive micro-components and semiconductors.
- **Export Competitiveness:** Adoption of global quality standards improves India's competitiveness in electronics exports and global value chains (GVCs).
- **Strategic Autonomy:** High-quality domestic manufacturing reduces technological dependence on imports and strengthens economic security.

Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)

About ECMS

- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology launched the **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS)** to develop a self-sustaining domestic electronics ecosystem.
- The scheme seeks to integrate India's electronics industry into **Global Value Chains (GVCs)**.
- It promotes both domestic and foreign investment across the electronics manufacturing value chain.
- It marks a strategic shift from **“Assembly in India”** toward **“Make and Design in India.”**

Objectives of ECMS

- Reduce import dependence in electronics components.
- Promote indigenous design and innovation capabilities.
- Increase domestic value addition in electronics manufacturing.
- Generate large-scale employment opportunities.
- Position electronics as a major export sector for India.

Incentive Structure under ECMS

- Provides **Turnover-Linked Incentives (TLI)** and **Capital Expenditure (Capex)-Linked Incentives**.
- Part of the incentives are linked with **employment generation**.
- Incentives are provided on a **first-come, first-served basis** for firms achieving early production targets.
- The scheme has a **six-year tenure** with a one-year gestation period for turnover-linked benefits.

Target Segments under ECMS

Electronics Components

- The scheme covers nearly **90% of the Bill of Materials (BoM)** for mobile phones, including:
 - Camera modules
 - Display modules
 - Multi-layer Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs)
 - Capacitors and resistors
- Electronics manufacturing equipment and capital machinery

ECMS and India's Electronics Ecosystem

Synergy with Other Schemes

- ECMS works alongside:
 - India Semiconductor Mission
 - Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes
 - Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme
- This integrated approach seeks to create a complete **“plug-and-play” electronics ecosystem** in India.

Economic Significance of ECMS

- The scheme is expected to generate approximately **₹10.34 lakh crore** in production over six years.
- It may create around **1.41 lakh direct jobs** along with several lakh indirect employment opportunities.
- Electronics manufacturing has already witnessed nearly **six-fold growth** in the last decade.
- India aims to make electronics its **second-largest export sector** after services.

Key Reforms Demanded by Government

Quality Upgradation

- Manufacturers must adopt **Six Sigma standards** and global quality benchmarks.

- This ensures reliability and competitiveness in global markets.

In-House Design Capability

- The government emphasises indigenous product design rather than dependence on imported technology.
- Design-led manufacturing improves domestic value addition and innovation capacity.

Domestic Supply Chain Development

- Promotion of a “**Swadeshi electronics ecosystem**” aims to reduce dependence on imports, especially from East Asian economies.
- It supports strategic and technological self-reliance.

Skill Development

- Structured workforce training programmes are being encouraged to create a skilled electronics manufacturing workforce.
- Skill development is critical for semiconductor fabrication and precision electronics production.

Accountability & Compliance

- The government has demanded **time-bound reforms** from beneficiary firms.
- Companies failing to meet quality and design benchmarks risk exclusion from subsidy benefits.

Challenges in India’s Electronics Manufacturing Sector

- Heavy dependence on imported semiconductor components and raw materials.
- Limited domestic research and development (R&D) ecosystem.
- High logistics and infrastructure costs compared to global manufacturing hubs.
- Shortage of highly skilled semiconductor and electronics engineers.
- Intense competition from countries like China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Domestic R&D:** Promote innovation and indigenous electronics design capabilities.
- **Enhance Quality Standards:** Universal adoption of Six Sigma and global certification standards is necessary.
- **Develop Semiconductor Ecosystem:** Accelerate semiconductor manufacturing and component localisation.
- **Expand Skilled Workforce:** Invest in specialised technical education and industry-oriented training.
- **Integrate with Global Value Chains:** Improve export competitiveness and attract long-term global investments.

Conclusion

The adoption of **Six Sigma standards** under ECMS reflects India’s strategic transition from low-value assembly operations toward a globally competitive **electronics manufacturing and design ecosystem**. By combining quality upgradation, domestic innovation, and supply-chain localisation, India seeks to strengthen technological self-reliance and emerge as a major global electronics manufacturing hub.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Six Sigma standards primarily aim to:

- (a) Increase tariff protection on electronics imports
- (b) Reduce manufacturing defects and improve quality

- (c) Promote export subsidies for electronics firms
- (d) Regulate digital payment systems

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS) in promoting India’s electronics manufacturing ecosystem and technological self-reliance. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Methanol Bunkering

Why in News: Deendayal Port Authority has advanced its **methanol bunkering capabilities**, marking a major step in India’s transition toward **green shipping** and the maritime sector’s target of achieving **net-zero emissions by 2050**.

Key Details

- Deendayal Port Authority successfully conducted a **shore-to-ship methanol bunkering trial** on April 2, 2026.
- The port received **Level 6 rating** on the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) Port Readiness Level (PRL) scale for methanol bunkering readiness.
- The initiative supports the adoption of low-carbon fuels such as **e-methanol** and **e-ammonia** in shipping.
- India aims to align its maritime sector with the global target of achieving **net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050**.
- Kandla Port plans to ensure availability of nearly **500 KTPA of Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin (RFNBO)-compliant e-methanol by 2028–29**.

Methanol – Meaning & Features

Meaning of Methanol

- Methanol, also known as **wood alcohol**, is the simplest alcohol with the chemical formula **CH₃OH**.
- It is a colourless, volatile, and clean-burning liquid fuel increasingly considered an alternative to conventional fossil fuels.

Production of Methanol

- Methanol is commonly produced through **steam reforming of natural gas**, generating synthesis gas which is later converted into methanol.
- It can also be produced from **biomass, coal, municipal waste, and renewable hydrogen**, making it suitable for green fuel transition.

Properties of Methanol

- Methanol mixes completely with water and burns cleaner than conventional petroleum fuels.
- It has a **high-octane value**, lower particulate emissions, and comparatively safer flammability characteristics than gasoline.

Methanol Bunkering – Meaning & Importance

Meaning of Bunkering

- Bunkering refers to the process of supplying fuel to ships for maritime operations.
- Methanol bunkering involves providing methanol fuel to vessels through shore-to-ship or ship-to-ship transfer systems.

Importance of Methanol Bunkering

- Methanol is emerging as a key **low-carbon marine fuel** capable of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in shipping.
- It supports global maritime decarbonisation goals under the International Maritime Organization.

Green Shipping & Maritime Decarbonisation

Meaning of Green Shipping

- Green shipping refers to environmentally sustainable maritime transport practices aimed at reducing carbon emissions, pollution, and ecological damage.
- It includes adoption of cleaner fuels, energy-efficient vessels, and sustainable port infrastructure.

Global Net-Zero Target

- The maritime sector globally seeks to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2050** to combat climate change.
- Shipping currently contributes around **3% of global greenhouse gas emissions**, making decarbonisation essential for climate goals.

Alternative Marine Fuels

- Fuels such as **e-methanol, e-ammonia, green hydrogen, LNG, and biofuels** are being explored as alternatives to heavy fuel oil.
- E-methanol and e-ammonia are considered promising because of lower lifecycle carbon emissions.

Significance of Kandla Port Initiative

Strategic Geographic Location

- Deendayal Port Authority is strategically located on India's western coast along major international shipping routes.
- It can serve as a critical hub for the emerging **Asia-Europe green shipping corridor**.

Existing Infrastructure Advantage

- Kandla Port already handled grey methanol cargo and possessed compatible infrastructure including storage tanks, jetties, and pipelines.
- This reduced the need for entirely new infrastructure development and accelerated readiness.

Strengthening India's Maritime Competitiveness

- Development of green fuel infrastructure enhances India's competitiveness in international maritime trade and logistics.
- It positions India as a future hub for sustainable shipping and maritime fuel supply chains.

Port Readiness Level (PRL) Framework

Meaning of PRL

- The **Port Readiness Level (PRL)** framework developed by the International Association of Ports and Harbors assesses preparedness of ports for alternative marine fuels.
- It evaluates infrastructure, safety standards, operational capability, and regulatory compliance.

Kandla's Achievement

- Kandla Port achieved **Level 6 readiness**, indicating advanced operational preparedness for methanol bunkering activities.
- The rating reflects alignment with international safety and sustainability standards.

Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin (RFNBO)

Meaning of RFNBO

- RFNBO refers to fuels produced from renewable electricity and non-biological sources, such as green hydrogen-derived e-methanol and e-ammonia.
- These fuels significantly reduce lifecycle carbon emissions compared to conventional fossil fuels.

Importance in Maritime Sector

- RFNBO-compliant fuels are expected to become central to future global shipping regulations and carbon reduction targets.
- Their adoption can help shipping companies meet international sustainability compliance requirements.

Role of Methanol in India's Energy Transition

Cleaner Alternative Fuel

- Methanol produces lower sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides, and particulate emissions compared to conventional marine fuels.
- It can contribute significantly toward cleaner transport and industrial decarbonisation.

Energy Security

- Methanol can be produced domestically from multiple feedstocks including biomass, coal, and renewable energy resources.
- This reduces dependence on imported crude oil and enhances energy security.

Economic Opportunities

- The methanol economy can generate investment opportunities in green fuels, shipbuilding, port infrastructure, and logistics sectors.
- It may also create new employment opportunities in clean energy and maritime industries.

Challenges in Methanol-Based Maritime Transition

Infrastructure Costs

- Developing methanol storage, transfer, and bunkering systems requires large-scale investment and specialised infrastructure.
- Ports need advanced safety mechanisms and operational training for handling alternative fuels.

Technology Transition

- Most existing vessels are designed for conventional fuels and require retrofitting or replacement to use methanol fuel systems.
- Transition costs may be significant for shipping companies.

Regulatory & Safety Concerns

- Methanol is toxic and requires strict handling protocols to prevent leakage, fire hazards, and environmental risks.
- Internationally harmonised regulations for alternative marine fuels are still evolving.

Government Initiatives Supporting Green Maritime Transition

Maritime India Vision 2030

- The government aims to modernise Indian ports and promote sustainable maritime infrastructure under **Maritime India Vision 2030**.
- Green fuel adoption and smart ports are major components of this strategy.

Green Shipping Corridor Development

- India is exploring partnerships for global green shipping corridors connecting major trade routes.
- Kandla's methanol bunkering initiative strengthens India's role in these emerging sustainable trade networks.

Way Forward

- **Expand Green Fuel Infrastructure:** Develop bunkering facilities for methanol, ammonia, and hydrogen across major Indian ports.

- **Promote Indigenous Green Fuel Production:** Encourage domestic production of green methanol and renewable hydrogen.
- **Strengthen Regulatory Framework:** Develop globally aligned safety and operational standards for alternative marine fuels.
- **Encourage Technological Innovation:** Support dual-fuel vessels, retrofitting technology, and green shipbuilding.
- **Enhance International Cooperation:** Collaborate with global maritime organisations for green shipping corridors and climate commitments.

Conclusion

The advancement of methanol bunkering at Deendayal Port Authority marks a significant milestone in India's transition toward sustainable maritime development. By adopting cleaner fuels and future-ready infrastructure, India is strengthening its position in the global green shipping ecosystem. The initiative supports climate commitments, energy security, and long-term

maritime competitiveness while accelerating India's journey toward a net-zero maritime future.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Methanol is considered an important alternative marine fuel primarily because:

- (a) It produces higher sulphur emissions than diesel
- (b) It is entirely non-flammable
- (c) It burns cleaner and can reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- (d) It can only be produced from crude oil

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of methanol bunkering in India's maritime decarbonisation strategy and its role in achieving sustainable shipping goals. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

DEFENCE & SECURITY

Bolstering deterrence through submarine dominance

Why in News: INS Aridhaman gained attention after Rajnath Singh hinted at its commissioning, signalling progress in India's **nuclear submarine programme** and strengthening of its sea-based nuclear deterrence capability.

Key Details

- **Third SSBN** in Arihant-class after INS Arihant and INS Arighat
- **Higher firepower:** Up to 24 K-15 and 8 K-4/K-5 missiles
- Strengthens **nuclear triad** (land, air, sea capability)
- Enhances **second-strike deterrence** in Indian Ocean region
- Boosts **indigenous defence and submarine capability**

Commissioning of INS Aridhaman

- On April 3, Rajnath Singh hinted at "Aridhaman" on X, sparking speculation about its commissioning
- INS Aridhaman is the **third SSBN** in India's nuclear submarine programme
- Earlier submarines: INS Arihant (2016) and INS Arighat (2024)
- Confirmation gained traction after Admiral Dinesh Tripathi stated trials were in final stage
- Next Arihant-class submarine likely to be commissioned soon

Enhanced Capabilities of INS Aridhaman

- Larger submarine (~7000 tonnes) with **improved firepower**
- Can carry **up to 24 K-15 Sagarika missiles**
- Also capable of deploying **8 nuclear-tipped K-4/K-5 missiles**
- Significant upgrade over earlier submarines (which carried fewer missiles)
- Represents **gradual technological advancement** in SSBN fleet

Strengthening India's Nuclear Triad

- Boosts India's **nuclear triad** (land, air, sea-based capability)
- Places India among elite nations like USA, Russia, China, France, UK
- Enhances **second-strike capability** and deterrence
- Supports India's **'No First Use' nuclear doctrine**
- Strengthens maritime deterrence against China and Pakistan

Changing Nature of Modern Warfare

- Warfare now **multi-domain** (land, sea, air interconnected)
- Indian Ocean gaining importance due to rising Chinese presence
- Conflicts like West Asia show **rapid shift to maritime zones** (e.g., Strait of Hormuz)

- Operations like Operation Sindoor highlight potential naval role
- Strong sea-based deterrence is now **strategically essential**

Self-Reliance & Future Submarine Plans

- SSBN programme boosts **indigenous defence capabilities**
- Reduces dependence on foreign suppliers amid global conflicts
- India plans **fourth Arihant-class submarine**
- Aim to develop **indigenous nuclear attack submarines (SSNs)** by 2036-38
- Submarine dominance emerging as a **core pillar of national security strategy**

Conclusion

The induction of INS **Aridhaman** marks a significant step in strengthening India's strategic deterrence and **maritime security**. As modern warfare becomes increasingly multi-domain, a robust sea-based nuclear capability is essential. **Alongside promoting self-reliance** in defence production, it enhances India's ability to counter emerging regional threats and reinforces its position as a responsible **nuclear power** committed to credible minimum deterrence.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. INS Aridhaman is a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN).
2. It is part of India's Arihant-class submarines.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Counter-Terror Security Shift

Why in News: The first anniversary of the **Pahalgam terror attack (April 2025)** highlights a major transformation in **India's counter-terrorism strategy in Jammu & Kashmir**.

Key Details

- The **Pahalgam attack (2025)** targeted tourists, killing **26 civilians**, exposing new vulnerabilities.
- Security forces shifted from **urban-centric deployment to terrain-dominant strategy**.
- Increased focus on **intelligence-led operations, surveillance technology, and local integration**.
- Despite improvements, **infiltration and intelligence gaps** remain key challenges.

Nature of Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir

- **Cross-border Terrorism:** Terrorism in J&K is largely linked to infiltration across the Line of Control (LoC), supported by external actors. Groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba have historically targeted civilians and security forces.

- **Shift to Soft Targets:** The Pahalgam attack marked a shift from targeting security forces to **civilians and tourists**, aiming to disrupt normalcy and economic revival.
- **Hybrid Militancy:** The emergence of “**hybrid militants**” (locals with no prior record) complicates identification and intelligence gathering.
- **Psychological Warfare:** Attacks on tourists aim to damage India’s image globally and undermine **confidence in governance and stability**.

Security Lapses & “Soft Frontier” Concept

- **Expansion without Security:** Around **70–75 new tourist destinations** were opened post-pandemic without proportional expansion of the security grid.
- **High-Altitude Vulnerability:** Areas in the **Pir Panjal range** lie close to infiltration routes, making them strategically sensitive despite being tourist hubs.
- **Faulty Assumptions:** Security agencies assumed militants would continue **urban attacks**, underestimating threats to remote civilian targets.
- **Soft Frontiers:** These newly opened areas became “soft frontiers”—accessible but insufficiently secured, exposing gaps in preparedness.

Shift in Security Strategy: ‘Road to Ridge’ Doctrine

- **Terrain Dominance:** Security forces shifted from **road-based deployment to controlling high-altitude ridges**, denying militants safe hideouts.
- **Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs):** Establishment of **40+ TOBs** at altitudes up to 9,000 feet enhances surveillance and rapid response capability.
- **Area Domination Exercises:** Increased patrols in forests and mountains aim to disrupt the **infiltration–hide–attack cycle** of militants.
- **Integrated Deployment:** Forces like Central Reserve Police Force and Rashtriya Rifles are now deployed in a coordinated manner.

Intelligence-Led Counter-Terrorism

- **Intel-First Approach:** Operations are now based on **real-time intelligence** rather than reactive engagement.
- **Precision Operations:** Example: **Operation Mahadev (2025)** successfully neutralised attackers using drones and human intelligence.
- **Network-Based Targeting:** Focus has shifted from individual militants to dismantling **entire terror ecosystems and recruitment modules**.
- **Inter-Agency Coordination:** Improved coordination between Army, police, and intelligence agencies reduces response time and enhances effectiveness.

Role of Technology in Internal Security

- **Drone Surveillance:** Deployment of surveillance and combat drones enhances monitoring in inaccessible terrains and reduces human risk.
- **Facial Recognition & QR Systems:** Aadhaar-linked QR identification for **50,000+ tourism workers** help verify identity and prevent infiltration of overground workers.
- **Counter-Drone Systems:** Advanced systems counter aerial threats, reflecting lessons from recent operations and evolving warfare.
- **Smart Surveillance:** Integration of sensors, satellite inputs, and AI-based analytics improves **situational awareness** in real time.

Community Integration & ‘Human Firewall’

- **Local Participation:** Integration of locals like guides, pony handlers, and vendors strengthens **grassroots intelligence networks**.
- **Trust-Building Measures:** Community involvement enhances cooperation and reduces alienation, which is critical in counter-insurgency.
- **Human Firewall Concept:** A verified network of locals acts as a **protective layer against militant infiltration** in tourist zones.
- **Economic Linkages:** Revival of tourism ensures livelihoods, aligning economic stability with security objectives.

Persistent Challenges in Internal Security

- **Infiltration through LoC:** Despite surveillance, infiltration continues due to **porous terrain and adverse weather conditions**.
- **Intelligence Gaps in Forest Areas:** Dense forests of Pir Panjal limit human intelligence and allow militants temporary concealment.
- **Technological Limitations:** Drones and sensors are affected by **extreme weather and terrain constraints**.
- **External Support:** Continued cross-border support to terrorism remains a structural challenge for India’s security apparatus.

Broader Internal Security Implications

- **Internal Security:** Highlights evolving nature of terrorism and need for **adaptive strategies**.
- **Border Management:** Emphasises importance of **integrated border management systems** and surveillance.
- **Role of Technology:** Demonstrates increasing reliance on **AI, drones, and digital identification** in governance.
- **Development-Security Nexus:** Tourism and economic development must be balanced with **robust security frameworks**.

Conclusion

India must adopt a **multi-layered counter-terrorism approach** combining **technology, intelligence, community participation, and diplomatic pressure**. Strengthening border surveillance, enhancing human intelligence, and maintaining a balance between security and civil liberties are essential. The Pahalgam attack underscores that internal security is dynamic and requires **continuous adaptation and vigilance**.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which of the following best describes “soft frontier” in internal security?

- Militarised border zones
- Areas opened without adequate security
- International trade zones
- Coastal regions

Answer: (b)

7th Edition of Exercise DUSTLIK

Why in News: The Indian Armed Forces is set to participate in the **7th edition of the India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise, DUSTLIK**, in Namangan, Uzbekistan, aimed at enhancing **bilateral military cooperation and operational synergy**.

About DUSTLIK

- **Exercise DUSTLIK:** The exercise, first held in 2019, is an annual bilateral event conducted alternately in India and Uzbekistan.

- **7th edition** features **Tri-services integration** training alongside personnel from the Uzbekistan Armed Forces.
- **Primary Objective:** The exercise aims to **strengthen defence cooperation and enhance joint operational capabilities in semi-mountainous terrain.**
 - It focuses on developing a **unified command-and-control framework** through joint tactical drills, strike missions, and land navigation exercises, culminating in **special operations for the neutralisation of unlawful armed groups.**

Uzbekistan

- **Location:** Uzbekistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, bordered by **Kazakhstan (north), Kyrgyzstan (northeast), Tajikistan (southeast), Afghanistan (south), and Turkmenistan (southwest).**
- **Physical Features:** The country is largely arid, with most of its area covered by the **Kyzylkum Desert** and the **Turan Plain.**
 - Mountain ranges such as the **Tien Shan, Gissar, and Alay** lie in the east, while fertile regions like the **Fergana Valley** and **Zeravshan Valley** support agriculture and historic cities like Samarkand and Bukhara.
- **Key Significance:** It is a doubly landlocked country (surrounded only by landlocked countries); the only other such country is Liechtenstein.
 - Uzbekistan holds strategic importance in **Central Asia**, includes the autonomous region of **Karakalpakstan**, and plays a key role in regional geopolitics and India's engagement with **Central Asia.**



S-400 Triumf (Sudarshan) System

Why in News: India is fast-tracking the procurement and induction of the remaining **S-400 Triumf air defence systems** from Russia to strengthen national airspace security amid emerging regional security challenges.

Key Details

- The **S-400 Triumf**, officially designated as **“Sudarshan”** in Indian service, is one of the world's most advanced long-range air defence systems.
- India signed a **USD 5.43 billion deal** with Russia in 2018 for the procurement of **five squadrons** of the S-400 system.
- As of 2026, **three squadrons** are operationally deployed along the western and northern borders.
- The system can engage aerial threats at ranges between **40 km and 400 km** using a multi-layered missile defence architecture.

- The S-400 recently demonstrated operational effectiveness during **Operation Sindoor**, intercepting hostile drones and missile threats.

S-400 Triumf – Meaning & Origin

- **Advanced Air Defence System:**



The S-400 Triumf is a long-range **Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM)** system designed to detect, track, and neutralise multiple aerial threats simultaneously.

- **Developed by Russia:** It was developed by Almaz-Antey for the Russian military and is considered among the most sophisticated air defence platforms globally.
- **Indian Designation:** In Indian service, the S-400 is referred to as **“Sudarshan”**, symbolising a protective strategic shield.
- **Strategic Role:** The system forms a critical component of India's integrated air defence network against modern aerial warfare threats.

Multi-Tiered Air Defence Capability

- **Layered Defence Architecture:** The S-400 uses different classes of missiles with engagement ranges from **40 km to 400 km**, enabling a multi-layered defence shield.
- **Wide Threat Spectrum:** It can intercept fighter aircraft, stealth jets, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles.
- **Strategic Importance:** Such layered defence improves survivability of critical infrastructure, military bases, and population centres during hostile attacks.
- **Deterrence Value:** The capability significantly enhances India's strategic deterrence against adversarial air operations.

Advanced Radar & Simultaneous Engagement

- **Panoramic Radar System:** The S-400 is equipped with advanced radar capable of detecting aerial targets at extremely long distances.
- **High Tracking Capacity:** It can simultaneously track around **300 targets** and engage nearly **36 threats** at once.
- **Precision Interception:** Advanced tracking and fire-control systems ensure high interception accuracy even against high-speed threats.
- **Network-Centric Warfare:** The radar integration strengthens India's shift towards network-enabled modern warfare systems.

India's Procurement & Deployment

- **Landmark Defence Deal:** India signed the S-400 agreement with Russia in 2018 despite geopolitical pressures and sanctions concerns under the US CAATSA law.
- **Deployment Strategy:** The operational squadrons are strategically deployed along India's western border with Pakistan and northern frontier with China.
- **Remaining Deliveries:** The remaining two squadrons are expected to be delivered by the end of 2026.
- **Two-Front Threat Preparedness:** Deployment reflects India's focus on preparedness against simultaneous security challenges from China and Pakistan.

Operation Sindoor & Operational Validation

- **Operational Success:** The S-400 reportedly performed effectively during **Operation Sindoor**, intercepting cross-border drones and missile threats.

- **Real-Time Combat Validation:** Successful interceptions validated the operational reliability and effectiveness of the system in live threat environments.
- **Strengthening Air Security:** The operation demonstrated India's growing capability to defend critical airspace against modern aerial threats.
- **Psychological Deterrence:** Such operational success also strengthens strategic signalling and deterrence against hostile actors.

Indigenous Synergy & Defence Modernisation

- **Integration with Indian Systems:** The S-400 complements India's indigenous **Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)** programme developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation.
- **Project Kusha:** India is simultaneously developing the **Project Kusha Extended Range Air Defence System** to build long-term indigenous capabilities.
- **Self-Reliance in Defence:** The integration reflects India's strategy of combining foreign acquisitions with indigenous defence modernisation under **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
- **Layered National Defence:** Together, these systems aim to establish a comprehensive, multi-layered national air defence architecture.

Strategic Importance of S-400 for India

- **Airspace Protection:** The S-400 significantly strengthens India's capability to protect critical military and civilian assets.
- **Counter to Regional Threats:** It acts as a force multiplier against advanced missile and air capabilities of neighbouring adversaries.
- **Strategic Stability:** Enhanced defensive capability improves India's deterrence posture and reduces vulnerability during crises.
- **Technology Upgrade:** The induction marks a major leap in India's transition toward advanced network-centric warfare systems.

Challenges & Concerns

- **Dependence on Foreign Technology:** Heavy reliance on imported strategic defence systems raises long-term supply and maintenance concerns.
- **CAATSA Sanctions Risk:** India's procurement from Russia faced potential sanctions risks under the US **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**.
- **Cost & Maintenance:** Advanced defence systems involve high acquisition, training, and lifecycle maintenance costs.
- **Need for Indigenous Alternatives:** India must accelerate indigenous air defence technologies to reduce strategic dependence.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Indigenous Defence Production:** Accelerate development of indigenous long-range air defence systems such as Project Kusha.
- **Enhance Integrated Air Defence:** Improve interoperability between imported and domestic defence systems for seamless operations.
- **Expand Defence R&D:** Greater investment in radar technology, missile systems, and electronic warfare capabilities is essential.
- **Strategic Diversification:** India should balance foreign defence procurement with long-term technological self-reliance.

Conclusion

The induction of the **S-400 Triumf (Sudarshan)** system represents a major enhancement in India's strategic air defence capability. By creating a robust multi-layered defence shield against aircraft, drones, and missile threats, the system

strengthens India's deterrence posture amid evolving regional security challenges. Simultaneously, integration with indigenous defence initiatives reflects India's broader vision of achieving technological self-reliance and comprehensive national security.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. The S-400 Triumf system, recently seen in news, is primarily associated with:

- Cyber warfare
- Ballistic missile submarine technology
- Long-range air defence system
- Satellite navigation system

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the strategic significance of the S-400 Triumf system for India's national security and defence modernisation. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Dunagiri 5th Ship of Project 17A

Why in News: The Indian Navy has received '**Dunagiri (Yard 3023)**' marking a significant leap forward in India's pursuit of **Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance)** in advanced warship design and maritime security.



Key Details

- **Historical Legacy:** The ship is a reincarnation of the original **INS Dunagiri (a Leander-class frigate)**, which served the Indian Navy for 33 years from 1977 to 2010.
- **Indigenous Design & Push:** Designed entirely by the **Warship Design Bureau (WDB)**, the project boasts an **indigenous content of 75%**.
 - This has significantly boosted the domestic defense ecosystem by involving over **200 MSMEs** and generating massive direct and indirect employment.
- **Advanced Propulsion Strategy:** The frigate operates on a **Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG)** propulsion plant, driving a **Controllable Pitch Propeller (CPP)** on each shaft, managed by a state-of-the-art **Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS)**.
- **Strategic Combat Capabilities:** It is equipped with a highly potent weapon and sensor suite, including **BrahMos Surface-to-Surface Missiles (SSM)**, **MFSTAR radar**, the **MRSAM complex**, and specialised rockets and torpedoes for **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW)**.
- **Project 17A (Nilgiri Class):** 'Dunagiri' is the **5th ship of the Project 17A frigates** and the second to be constructed by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd (GRSE), Kolkata**.
 - Project 17A is India's programme to build seven Nilgiri-class stealth frigates as an upgraded successor to the **Shivalik class**.
 - Of the seven frigates, four (Nilgiri, Udaygiri, Taragiri, Mahendragiri) are being built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL), and three (Himgiri, Dunagiri, Vindhyagiri) by GRSE.

SOCIAL ISSUES

India's rural models are shaping development diplomacy

Why in News: India's National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) gains global attention as its SHG-based model expands across Africa, highlighting success in women empowerment, financial inclusion, and South-South development cooperation.

Key Details

- NRLM has mobilised over 100 million rural households into **self-help groups (SHGs)**
- Enabled **financial inclusion and credit access** for over 50 million women
- Promotes **women-led livelihoods, skills, and community institutions**
- Model is being **adopted by African countries** for inclusive development
- Strengthens **India's development diplomacy** through knowledge-sharing

Objectives of NRLM

- Launched in 2011 to **reduce multidimensional rural poverty**
- Focus on **self-employment, financial inclusion, and skill development**
- Aims to create **sustainable livelihoods for rural households**
- Targets **women-led economic empowerment through SHGs**
- Promotes **long-term capacity building and income generation**

Scale and Achievements

- Covers over **100 million households across 742 districts**
- Mobilised **9 million+ Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**
- Over **20 million women earning ₹1 lakh+ annually**
- Enabled **₹12 lakh crore bank linkage and ₹51,368 crore support**
- Strengthened by **₹19,200 crore allocation in Union Budget 2026–27**

Institutional Framework

- Built **multi-tier community institutions** (village to block level)
- Developed **community-based cadres** for last-mile delivery
- Integrated women into **formal financial systems**
- Encourages **peer learning and collective decision-making**
- Ensures **financial discipline and accountability mechanisms**

Global Expansion and Influence

- Model being adopted across **Global South, especially Africa**
- Countries like **Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda** studying NRLM
- Promotes **South-South cooperation and peer learning**

- Seen as a **replicable and scalable development model**
- Reflects shift from **Western models to local innovations**

Reasons for Global Appeal

- Emphasis on **women's collective empowerment**
- **Low-cost, community-driven approach** suitable for developing nations
- Fits **informal economies and microenterprise needs**
- Focus on **institution-building rather than short-term schemes**
- Strengthens **local governance and accountability**

Role in India's Development Diplomacy

- Marks shift toward **exporting institutional development models**
- Builds **long-term partnerships and knowledge exchange**
- Opens avenues in **digital governance, finance, and agriculture**
- Suggests need for a **Rural Livelihood Knowledge Exchange Platform**
- Positions India as a **leader in global development practices**

Conclusion

The NRLM represents a transformative model of inclusive **rural development** by combining social **mobilisation, financial access**, and institutional capacity-building. Its growing **global adoption** reflects the strength of locally rooted, scalable solutions from the Global South. By exporting such models, India is **redefining development cooperation** beyond aid, fostering partnerships based on shared experiences, sustainability, and empowerment-driven growth.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) exemplifies how domestic development models can shape global cooperation." Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words)

Foundational Education & Shared Responsibility

Why in News: With the start of the new academic session in 2026, nearly **2 crore children enrolling in Class 1** highlights the importance of foundational education under **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.

Key Details

- Around **2 crore children** enter formal schooling annually, marking a crucial stage in human capital formation.
- **NEP 2020** emphasises **foundational literacy, numeracy, and holistic development**.
- **NIPUN Bharat Mission** aims to achieve foundational learning by **Grade 3**.
- Focus on **health, well-being, multilingualism, and digital balance** in school education.

Foundational Literacy & Numeracy (FLN) – Core Priority

- **NIPUN Bharat Mission:** Launched in 2021, it aims to ensure all children achieve **basic reading and arithmetic**

skills by Grade 3, addressing learning poverty in early years.

- **Learning Crisis in India:** Reports like ASER indicate gaps where many children in primary classes struggle with **basic reading and numeracy**, making FLN a policy priority.
- **Shift from Rote Learning:** Focus has moved from memorisation to **conceptual understanding and competency-based learning**, encouraging critical thinking from early stages.
- **Long-term Impact:** Strong foundational skills improve **learning outcomes, employability, and productivity**, directly contributing to demographic dividend.

NEP 2020 & Holistic Education Approach

- **5+3+3+4 Structure:** Introduces a new curricular structure focusing on **early childhood care and education (ECCE)** and experiential learning.
- **Whole Child Development:** Emphasis on **cognitive, emotional, physical, and ethical growth**, moving beyond exam-centric education.
- **Integration of Co-curriculars:** Arts, sports, and vocational education are integrated into curriculum to develop **life skills and creativity**.
- **Alignment with SDG-4:** NEP aligns with **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)** ensuring inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

Early Childhood Care & Learning Environment

- **Importance of Early Years (3–8 years):** Research shows **over 85% of brain development occurs** in early childhood, making this stage critical for learning.
- **Play-based Learning:** NEP promotes **activity-based and discovery-oriented learning**, improving curiosity and engagement among children.
- **Role of Teachers:** A supportive teacher transforms hesitation into **confidence and participation**, shaping long-term educational outcomes.
- **Safe & Inclusive Schools:** Schools must ensure **psychological safety, inclusivity, and belongingness**, especially for first-generation learners.

Health, Nutrition & Physical Well-being

- **PM POSHAN Scheme:** Provides **mid-day meals** to improve nutrition, attendance, and retention in schools.
- **Rising Lifestyle Concerns:** Increasing **childhood obesity and reduced physical activity** due to sedentary lifestyles require policy intervention.
- **School Health Initiatives:** Measures like **mandatory physical education, nutrition awareness boards (oil/sugar boards)** promote healthy habits.
- **Learning Outcomes Link:** Healthy children demonstrate **better concentration, participation, and academic performance**.

Technology & Digital Challenges

- **Digital Learning Expansion:** Platforms like DIKSHA and online tools enhance **access and quality of education**, especially post-pandemic.
- **Concerns of Screen Time:** Excessive use of digital devices impacts **attention span, mental health, and social interaction**.
- **Balanced Approach:** Technology must act as a **learning enabler**, not a distraction, requiring guidance from schools and parents.
- **Digital Divide:** Unequal access to devices and internet remains a challenge, affecting **equity in education**.

Multilingualism & Inclusive Education

- **Mother Tongue Instruction:** NEP recommends teaching in **mother tongue/local language till Grade 5**, improving comprehension and retention.
- **Cultural Identity:** Multilingual education strengthens **cultural roots and cognitive flexibility** among students.
- **Inclusive Classrooms:** Focus on **gender equality, socio-economic inclusion, and special needs education**.
- **Bridging Inequalities:** Education acts as a tool for **social mobility and reducing disparities**.

Shared Responsibility – State, Society & Family

- **Government Role:** Policy frameworks, funding, and schemes ensure **access, quality, and equity** in education.
- **Role of Teachers:** Teachers act as **nation builders**, shaping values, skills, and aspirations of students.
- **Parental Involvement:** Home environment significantly influences **learning behaviour and motivation** of children.
- **Community Participation:** Collective engagement creates a **supportive ecosystem for education**, making it a shared national mission.

Conclusion

The first day of school symbolises not just a child's journey but a **nation's commitment to its future**. Strengthening foundational learning, ensuring inclusive and healthy environments, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders are essential. Achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047** depends on investing in education today, making every classroom a space for nurturing responsible and capable citizens.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. NIPUN Bharat Mission aims to achieve:

- (a) Universal secondary education
- (b) Foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3
- (c) Digital education in rural areas
- (d) Teacher training reforms

Answer: (b)

AI in School Education

Why in News: The CBSE has introduced a new **Computational Thinking (CT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) curriculum for Classes 3–8 (2026–27)**, raising concerns about feasibility and clarity.

Key Details

- CBSE aims to develop **logical thinking, problem-solving, and AI awareness** among school students.
- Curriculum includes **Computational Thinking (Classes 3–8)** and **AI concepts with ethics (Classes 6–8)**.
- **Time Allocation:** For Classes 3–5, **50 hours** annually are allocated (integrated with Environmental Studies and Maths). For Classes 6–8, **100 hours** annually are allocated (40 hrs Advanced CT, 20 hrs AI Fundamentals, 40 hrs Projects)
- It introduces advanced topics like **machine learning, regression, and classification** at early stages.
- Experts highlight **lack of clarity, pedagogical mismatch, and implementation challenges**.
- The curriculum was developed by a 10-member expert committee led by **Dr. Karthik Raman (IIT Madras)**.

Computational Thinking (CT) as Foundational Skill

- **Core Components of CT:** Computational Thinking includes **decomposition, pattern recognition,**

abstraction, and algorithmic thinking, which are essential for structured problem-solving in real life.

- **Integration with Existing Subjects:** CT is already embedded in **Mathematics and logical reasoning curricula**, but its integration across disciplines like Science and Social Studies remains limited.
- **Global Educational Trends:** Countries like the UK and Finland have introduced CT gradually, focusing on **age-appropriate skill development rather than technical complexity**.

Artificial Intelligence Curriculum: Scope and Concerns

- **Early Introduction of Complex Concepts:** Topics like **supervised learning, regression, and clustering** are typically taught at undergraduate levels, raising concerns about cognitive readiness of students.
- **Conceptual Disconnect:** Understanding **machine intelligence vs human intelligence** requires abstract reasoning, which may not be fully developed in middle school children.
- **Use of No-Code Tools:** While no-code AI tools can encourage experimentation, they risk becoming **mechanical usage without conceptual understanding**.
- **Mismatch with Learning Outcomes:** The curriculum's ambitious goals lack clarity on **pedagogical methods and measurable outcomes**, leading to possible superficial learning.

AI Literacy, Ethics, and Social Implications

- **Growing Exposure to AI Tools:** Students increasingly interact with AI via **chatbots, recommendation systems, and social media**, making AI literacy necessary.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Issues such as **bias, privacy, data misuse, and algorithmic discrimination** need deeper engagement rather than token inclusion in curriculum.
- **Perception of AI as Authority:** Children often view AI as an **all-knowing, non-judgmental entity**, which may affect critical thinking and independent reasoning.
- **Need for Critical Digital Literacy:** AI education should focus on **questioning outputs, verifying information, and understanding limitations of AI systems**.

Pedagogical and Structural Challenges in India

- **Digital Divide:** According to various surveys, **access to digital infrastructure remains uneven**, especially in rural and government schools.
- **Teacher Preparedness:** Most teachers lack **training in AI and emerging technologies**, limiting effective classroom delivery.
- **Overburdened Curriculum:** Adding AI without reducing existing content may increase **information overload and stress among students**.
- **Rote Learning System:** India's education system still struggles with **conceptual learning**, making integration of interdisciplinary subjects challenging.

CT-AI Disconnect and Conceptual Issues

- **Different Knowledge Paradigms:** CT is based on **symbolic logic and algorithms**, whereas AI (especially machine learning) relies on **data-driven statistical models**.

- **Weak Theoretical Linkage:** The claim that CT directly underpins AI is **oversimplified**, as both involve distinct reasoning processes.
- **Lack of Research in School-Level AI Education:** Globally, there is limited evidence on **effective AI curriculum design for primary and middle school levels**.
- **Risk of Superficial Learning:** Without conceptual clarity, students may learn **terminology without understanding**, defeating the purpose of education reform.

Way Forward

- **Age-Appropriate Curriculum Design:** Focus on **basic digital literacy, logical reasoning, and ethical awareness** at primary levels instead of advanced AI concepts.
- **Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** Invest in large-scale **teacher upskilling programs** through platforms like DIKSHA and NCERT modules.
- **Phased Implementation:** Introduce AI curriculum in **pilot phases**, with feedback-based revisions before nationwide rollout.
- **Focus on Critical Thinking:** Emphasize **AI as a tool, not authority**, encouraging questioning, verification, and independent thinking.
- **Bridging Digital Divide:** Strengthen infrastructure under initiatives like **Digital India and PM eVIDYA** to ensure equitable access.

Conclusion

The CBSE's AI curriculum reflects India's aspiration to become a **knowledge and technology-driven society**, but its success depends on aligning ambition with ground realities. A balanced approach—rooted in **pedagogical clarity, inclusivity, and critical thinking**—is essential to ensure that AI education empowers students rather than overwhelming them.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the challenges and opportunities in integrating Artificial Intelligence into school education in India. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Parenting in the Digital Age

Why in News: The rapid rise of AI tools like ChatGPT and digital platforms is transforming how children learn, communicate, and develop skills, raising concerns about parenting approaches in the modern era.

Key Details

- Parents today face challenges in ensuring discipline and academic performance in an era of easy access to information. Traditional learning methods like rote memorisation are being questioned due to the availability of AI tools.
- Digital platforms enable children to generate polished communication instantly without real-life experience. This creates a gap between perceived competence and actual emotional and intellectual maturity.
- The education system continues to emphasise examinations and memorisation. However, these skills may not fully align with the demands of a rapidly evolving digital world.
- Parenting now requires balancing control, guidance, and adaptation to technological change. The focus is shifting from information acquisition to skill development and character building.

Education System and Learning Models

- **Rote Learning System:** Traditional education emphasises memorisation and reproduction of information. This approach helps in discipline and exam performance but may limit creativity and critical thinking.
- **Skill-Based Learning:** Modern pedagogy focuses on problem-solving, analytical thinking, and adaptability. These skills are more relevant in dynamic environments influenced by technology and innovation.
- **Examination-Centric Approach:** Success is often measured through marks and ranks. This creates pressure on students and may overlook holistic development.
- **Need for Reform:** There is a growing demand to align education with real-world requirements. This includes integrating digital literacy and experiential learning.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Learning

- **AI Accessibility:** Tools like ChatGPT provide instant access to information and content creation. This reduces dependency on memorisation but raises concerns about originality and understanding.
- **Automation of Tasks:** Students can use AI for writing emails, assignments, and communication. This may weaken their ability to develop independent thinking and expression skills.
- **Learning Shift:** Focus is moving from “knowing information” to “knowing how to use information.” This requires a change in teaching methods and evaluation systems.
- **Risk of Overdependence:** Excessive reliance on AI can reduce cognitive effort. It may hinder long-term intellectual and emotional growth.

Role of Discipline and Parenting

- **Discipline as Foundation:** Parental supervision helps children develop habits like consistency and responsibility. These qualities are essential for long-term success in any field.
- **Endurance Building:** Children learn to perform tasks they may not enjoy. This prepares them for real-life situations requiring persistence.
- **Value Transmission:** Parents play a key role in shaping values like honesty, hard work, and integrity. These values cannot be replaced by technology or automation.
- **Balancing Control and Freedom:** Excessive control may strain relationships, while too much freedom can lead to misuse of technology. A balanced approach is necessary for healthy development.

Digital Behaviour and Identity Formation

- **Curated Digital Identity:** Children can present themselves differently online using AI tools. This may create a disconnect between real identity and virtual representation.
- **Reduced Real-world Interaction:** Digital communication reduces face-to-face interactions. This limits opportunities to develop emotional intelligence and social skills.
- **Loss of Trial-and-Error Learning:** Earlier, mistakes helped individuals learn communication skills. AI-generated perfection reduces such learning experiences.
- **Psychological Impact:** Constant comparison and digital validation can affect self-esteem. It may also create unrealistic expectations among children.

Challenges in Modern Parenting

- **Unpredictable Future:** Rapid technological changes make it difficult to predict future skill requirements. Parents must

prepare children for adaptability rather than fixed knowledge.

- **Systemic Constraints:** The education system still follows traditional evaluation methods. This creates a mismatch between learning and real-world needs.
- **Technology Integration:** Completely restricting technology is not feasible. Instead, children must be taught how to use it responsibly.
- **Emotional Gap:** Overuse of digital tools may weaken emotional bonding and communication within families. Parents need to actively engage with children beyond academics.

Ethical and Emotional Development

- **Learning from Mistakes:** Real-life errors help individuals understand consequences and improve behaviour. This is essential for developing judgment and maturity.
- **Authentic Communication:** Expressing thoughts without external assistance builds confidence. It also enhances clarity and emotional connection.
- **Distinction Between Honesty and Presentation:** AI can polish responses, but cannot replace genuine intent. Children must learn the difference between authenticity and artificial perfection.
- **Character Building:** Emotional resilience and self-awareness are crucial life skills. These can only develop through real experiences, not automated tools.

Way Forward

- **Blended Learning Approach:** Combine traditional discipline with modern skill-based education. This will ensure both academic success and practical competence.
- **Responsible AI Usage:** Teach children ethical and limited use of AI tools. This will prevent overdependence while leveraging benefits.
- **Education Reforms:** Shift focus from rote learning to critical thinking and creativity. Assessment methods should reflect real-world skills.
- **Active Parenting:** Encourage open communication and emotional support. Parents should guide rather than control children’s digital exposure.

Conclusion

Parenting in the digital age requires balancing traditional values with technological realities. While AI tools offer convenience, they cannot replace discipline, emotional growth, and real-life learning. The goal is to ensure that children use technology as a tool, not become dependent on it.

Limits of neutrality in addressing caste

Why in News: The Supreme Court stayed UGC Equity Regulations, 2026, amid debate on caste-based discrimination definitions, highlighting concerns over inclusion, constitutional equality, and institutional accountability in higher education.

Key Details

- Focus on **caste-based discrimination** in higher education
- Originates from **student suicides and systemic bias case**
- Debate over **caste-neutral vs targeted definition**
- Emphasis on **substantive equality (Articles 14 & 15)**
- Need for **strong enforcement and accountability mechanisms**

Background and Context

- The Supreme Court issued an interim stay on the **UGC Equity Regulations, 2026**.

Supreme court directions on disabled-friendly prisons

Why in News: Recently, directed the constitution of a high-powered committee to formulate a comprehensive framework for making prisons across India disabled-friendly.

Key Details

- The move came in response to concerns regarding the inhumane conditions faced by prisoners with disabilities and the lack of accessible infrastructure in Indian prisons.
- The Court emphasized that imprisonment does not extinguish the fundamental rights of inmates, especially the right to dignity and equality guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

Background

The issue gained prominence following reports regarding the treatment of disabled prisoners such as:

- Lack of mobility support
- Denial of assistive devices
- Inadequate medical care
- Poor prison accessibility

The petition before the Court argued that prisons in India remain structurally exclusionary for persons with disabilities.

Key Directions of the Supreme Court

1. Formation of a High-Powered Committee

The Court expanded the mandate of an existing prison reform committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice S. Ravindra Bhat to specifically address disability-inclusive prison reforms.

Composition

The committee includes:

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
- Prison administration experts
- State representatives

2. Creation of Disabled-Friendly Infrastructure

The Court directed prisons to ensure universal accessibility through:

- Ramps and handrails
- Accessible toilets
- Barrier-free movement
- Sensory-safe environments
- Wheelchair-friendly facilities

The aim is to align prison infrastructure with accessibility norms under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

3. Provision of Assistive Devices

States and Union Territories were directed to ensure availability of:

- Wheelchairs
- Hearing aids
- Braille materials
- Prosthetic support
- Other assistive technologies

The Court also asked authorities to develop procurement and maintenance protocols for such devices.

4. Medical and Mental Health Support

The Court emphasized:

- Specialized medical care
- Regular health assessments
- Mental healthcare support
- Rehabilitation services

- These regulations stem from a case addressing caste discrimination and student suicides.
- The case exposes **systemic failures** in ensuring equality in higher education.
- Focus is on creating inclusive and safe institutional environments.
- Highlights urgency of **addressing structural discrimination**.

Definition of Caste-Based Discrimination

- Defined as discrimination against **SCs, STs, and OBCs**.
- Targets historically marginalised communities.
- Recognises caste as a **structural issue**, not isolated acts.
- Aims for clarity rather than **exclusion**.
- Focuses on systemic **inequality embedded in institutions**.

Limitations of Caste-Neutral Approach

- Critics argue for inclusion of **“general category”** students.
- Neutrality assumes equal impact of discrimination across groups.
- Ignores **structural hierarchies and power imbalances**.
- Risks equating systemic **oppression with individual bias**.
- Weakens targeted **legal protection** against caste-based harm.

Constitutional Perspective on Equality

- Article 14 ensures **equality before law**.
- Article 15 **allows special provisions for** disadvantaged groups.
- Promotes **substantive equality**, not just formal equality.
- Recognises need for **differential treatment** to correct injustice.
- Rejects **one-size-fits-all neutrality** in unequal societies.

Importance of Effective Implementation

- Main issue lies in **weak enforcement** and accountability.
- Need for **independent complaint mechanisms**.
- Ensure **time-bound investigations** and transparency.
- Require **audits, monitoring, and institutional responsibility**.
- Strong **implementation is key** to achieving real equality.

Conclusion

The debate on UGC Equity Regulations highlights the **tension between formal neutrality and substantive equality**.

Addressing caste-based discrimination requires recognising structural inequalities rather than adopting a uniform approach.

Strengthening implementation, accountability, and institutional responsiveness is crucial. Only a robust, **context-sensitive** framework can ensure dignity, inclusion, and justice for historically marginalised students in higher education.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. “A caste-neutral approach to discrimination often fails to address structural inequalities embedded in Indian society.” In the light of the debate surrounding the UGC Equity Regulations, 2026, critically examine the limits of neutrality in addressing caste-based discrimination in higher education. Discuss the constitutional basis for substantive equality and suggest measures to ensure inclusive educational institutions. (250 words, 15 marks)

This recognizes the heightened vulnerability of disabled prisoners in overcrowded prison environments.

5. Enhanced Visitation and Communication Rights

The Court called for:

- Easier family visitation
- Better communication access
- Humane custodial practices

This is aimed at preserving social and emotional well-being of prisoners with disabilities.

6. Time-Bound Compliance and Monitoring

The committee was asked to submit a consolidated report within four months, ensuring:

- Uniform national standards
- Periodic monitoring
- Accountability mechanisms

The Court warned that violations could attract penalties under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

Constitutional and Legal Basis

Constitutional Provisions	
Provision	Relevance
Article 14	Equality before law
Article 21	Right to life and dignity
Article 41	Assistance to disabled persons
Article 39A	Equal justice and legal aid

Statutory Framework

- Mandates accessibility and reasonable accommodation.
- Recognizes equality and dignity of persons with disabilities.
- Governs prison administration, though criticized as outdated.

Standards

India is also guided by:

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- Nelson Mandela Rules on treatment of prisoners

Major Challenges in Implementation

- **Overcrowded Prisons:** Indian prisons frequently operate above capacity, limiting accessibility reforms.
- **Poor Infrastructure:** Many prisons are colonial-era structures unsuitable for retrofitting.
- **Lack of Disability Data:** Absence of reliable disability-disaggregated prison data hampers policy design.
- **Financial Constraints:** Accessibility modifications require substantial funding.
- **Administrative Insensitivity:** Prison staff often lack disability-awareness training.
- **Federal Challenges:** "Prisons" is a State subject under the Seventh Schedule, leading to uneven implementation.

Significance of the Judgment

The judgment is important because it:

- Reinforces the reformatory theory of punishment
- Expands disability rights jurisprudence
- Recognizes prisoners as rights-bearing citizens
- Promotes inclusive governance
- Strengthens constitutional morality

It also reflects a broader judicial push toward humane prison reforms, including open correctional institutions and prison decongestion measures.

Way Forward

- **Infrastructure Modernization**
 - Retrofitting old prisons
 - Universal accessibility standards
- **Capacity Building**
 - Disability-sensitivity training for prison officials
- **Technological Integration**
 - Digital grievance redressal systems
 - Accessible communication tools
- **Better Data Collection**
 - National disability audit of prisons
- **Independent Monitoring**
 - State Human Rights Commissions and Legal Services Authorities should conduct periodic inspections.
- **Prison Reform Framework**
 - Replace punitive incarceration with rehabilitation-oriented correctional systems.

Conclusion

- The Supreme Court's directions on disabled-friendly prisons mark a transformative step toward ensuring dignity, equality, and humane treatment for incarcerated persons with disabilities.
- The judgment reiterates that constitutional rights do not end at prison gates and that a civilized democracy must uphold the dignity of even the most marginalized individuals. Effective implementation now depends on cooperative federalism, administrative commitment, and sustained institutional reform.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. The recent directions of the Supreme Court of India on disabled-friendly prisons have expanded the discourse on prison reforms and rights of persons with disabilities in India. Discuss the constitutional basis of these directions, the major challenges in implementation, and suggest measures to ensure inclusive prison administration. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

HISTORY & CULTURE

Religious Patronage & Mauryan Legacy

Why in News: On the occasion of **Mahavir Jayanti**, the Prime Minister inaugurated the **Samrat Samprati Museum in Gandhinagar**, highlighting the role of Samprati in spreading Jainism.

Key Details

- Samrat Samprati, grandson of **Ashoka**, is regarded as a key patron of **Jainism**.
- A museum dedicated to him was inaugurated in **Gandhinagar**, reflecting renewed interest in Jain heritage.
- While Ashoka promoted **Buddhism**, Samprati is credited with spreading Jainism across India and beyond.
- Historical and Jain texts highlight his role in **temple construction, missionary activities, and icon dissemination**.

Mauryan Empire & Religious Pluralism

- **Diverse Religious Traditions:** The Mauryan period (4th–2nd century BCE) witnessed the coexistence of **Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmanism**, reflecting India's long-standing pluralistic ethos.
- **State Patronage of Religions:** Rulers like Ashoka extended patronage to Buddhism, but evidence suggests **tolerance towards multiple sects**, as seen in inscriptions advocating respect for all faiths.
- **Role of Royal Lineage:** Members of the Mauryan dynasty, including **Chandragupta Maurya**, are associated with Jainism, indicating **religious diversity within the ruling elite**.
- **Continuity of Traditions:** Despite Ashoka's Buddhist emphasis, Jainism continued to flourish, especially in **western and southern India**, showing resilience of religious traditions.

Ashoka and the Spread of Buddhism

- **Dhamma as State Policy:** Ashoka propagated **Dhamma**, a moral code based on compassion, non-violence, and welfare, through **rock and pillar edicts** across the empire.
- **Missionary Activities:** He sent Buddhist missions to regions like **Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia**, contributing to Buddhism's global spread.
- **Institutional Support:** Construction of **stupas, viharas, and monasteries** strengthened Buddhist institutions and ensured long-term sustainability.
- **Ethical Kingship Model:** Ashoka is regarded as an ideal ruler who combined **political authority with moral governance**, influencing later Asian polities.

Samprati: The Jain Counterpart of Ashoka

- **Lineage and Reign:** Samprati, grandson of Ashoka and son of Kunala, ruled around **230–220 BCE**, possibly sharing power with Dasharatha after imperial division.
- **Conversion to Jainism:** Jain traditions suggest his conversion under the monk **Suhastin**, linking royal authority with **Jain monastic networks**.

- **Shvetambara Traditions:** Samprati holds a prominent place in **Shvetambara Jain texts**, where he is portrayed as a devout patron and propagator of Jainism.
- **Parallel with Ashoka:** Scholars often compare Samprati to Ashoka, as both rulers used **state resources to promote religious ideologies**.

Spread of Jainism under Samprati

- **Missionary Expansion:** Samprati is credited with sending Jain monks to regions such as **Afghanistan, Nepal, and possibly Central Asia**, expanding the faith's geographical reach.
- **Temple Construction:** He is traditionally associated with building **thousands of Jain temples**, especially in western India, though many lack inscriptions.
- **Icon Installation:** Promotion of **Jina idols and iconography** helped institutionalize Jain worship practices and strengthen religious identity.
- **Cultural Integration:** Jainism under Samprati adapted to regional contexts, facilitating its spread among **trading communities and urban centers**.

Comparative Analysis: Ashoka vs Samprati

- **Religious Patronage:** Ashoka promoted Buddhism, while Samprati championed Jainism, reflecting **state-supported religious dissemination**.
- **Mode of Expansion:** Both rulers used **missionaries, architecture, and symbolism** to spread their respective religions.
- **Historical Evidence:** Ashoka's legacy is supported by **epigraphic evidence**, whereas Samprati's contributions are largely preserved in **literary and religious traditions**.
- **Impact on Society:** Their efforts contributed to the spread of **non-violence (Ahimsa), ethical conduct, and spiritual values** in Indian society.

Contemporary Relevance

- **Cultural Heritage Recognition:** Establishment of museums like Samprati Museum reflects efforts to **preserve and promote ancient heritage**.
- **Soft Power and Civilizational Identity:** India's ancient traditions like Buddhism and Jainism contribute to its **global cultural diplomacy**.
- **Religious Tolerance:** Mauryan pluralism provides lessons for **modern secularism and coexistence**.
- **Art and Architecture Linkages:** Temple building and iconography connect to **Indian art & culture syllabus**, including **Jain architecture and sculpture**.

Conclusion

The legacy of Ashoka and Samprati highlights the role of rulers in shaping India's religious and cultural landscape. While Ashoka's contributions to Buddhism are historically well documented, Samprati's association with Jainism underscores the importance of **diverse religious patronage in ancient India**. Recognizing such figures through institutions like museums strengthens cultural awareness and reinforces India's tradition of **pluralism, tolerance, and ethical governance**.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Which Mauryan ruler is known for issuing rock edicts promoting Dhamma?

- (a) Chandragupta Maurya
- (b) Bindusara
- (c) Ashoka
- (d) Samprati

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Compare the role of Ashoka and Samprati in the spread of Buddhism and Jainism respectively. How did state patronage influence religious expansion in ancient India? (150 words, 10 marks)

Buddha Purnima, Relic Diplomacy

Why in News: The sacred exposition of the Piprahwa relics of Gautama Buddha in Ladakh on the occasion of Buddha Purnima highlights India's cultural heritage, Buddhist diplomacy, and the revival of spiritual tourism.

Key Details

- Ladakh is hosting a two-week-long public exposition of Buddha relics along the Indus River in Leh. This is the first time these relics are being displayed in India for public veneration under government initiative.
- The relics were originally discovered at Piprahwa and are believed to be associated with the Buddha's mortal remains. Their return to India in 2025 marks an important step in cultural restitution and heritage preservation.
- The event reflects India's identity as the birthplace of Buddhism and a centre of ancient spiritual traditions. It also reinforces Ladakh's importance in the global Buddhist cultural landscape.
- The exposition is expected to promote spiritual tourism and strengthen India's soft power globally. Such events attract international Buddhist communities and enhance cultural diplomacy.



Buddhism in India

- **Origin of Buddhism:** Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BCE with the teachings of Gautama Buddha. It emerged as a reform movement against ritualism and emphasised ethical living and compassion.
- **Core Teachings:** Concepts like the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path guide individuals towards liberation. These teachings promote moderation, non-violence, and mental discipline.
- **Spread of Buddhism:** Buddhism spread across Asia through trade routes and royal patronage. It became a

major cultural and religious force in regions like Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

- **Decline in India:** Over time, Buddhism declined due to socio-political changes and revival of other traditions. However, its legacy continues through monuments, philosophy, and global influence.

Relic Tradition in Buddhism

- **Mahaparinirvana Concept:** After the Buddha's death, his relics were divided among different rulers. These relics became sacred objects of worship and reverence.
- **Stupa Culture:** Relics were enshrined in stupas, which became important pilgrimage sites. Stupas symbolise the Buddha's presence and spiritual enlightenment.
- **Ashokan Contribution:** Ashoka redistributed relics across his empire. This led to the widespread construction of stupas and expansion of Buddhism.
- **Global Spread:** The tradition of relic veneration spread across Asia over centuries. Today, relics are preserved in countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Japan.

Piprahwa Relics and Historical Significance

- **Discovery:** The relics were discovered in the 1890s by William Claxton Peppé at Piprahwa. Excavation revealed urns with inscriptions linking them to the Buddha's Sakya clan.
- **Archaeological Evidence:** The Brahmi inscription confirms the authenticity of the relics. It provides crucial historical validation of early Buddhist practices.
- **Colonial Context:** Many relics were taken abroad during colonial times. This reflects issues of cultural appropriation and heritage displacement.
- **Repatriation:** India successfully brought back part of these relics in 2025. This marks an important achievement in preserving national heritage.

Ladakh as a Buddhist Cultural Hub

- **Geographical Importance:** Ladakh lies along ancient trade routes connecting India with Central Asia. This facilitated the spread of Buddhism and cultural exchange.
- **Monastic Tradition:** The region is home to ancient monasteries and stupas. These institutions preserve Buddhist teachings and traditions.
- **Archaeological Heritage:** Sites like Mulbekh Maitreya and Sani Stupa reflect early Buddhist influence. They provide insights into the region's historical and cultural evolution.
- **Modern Relevance:** Ladakh continues to be a centre of Buddhist practice and pilgrimage. The current exposition strengthens its global cultural identity.

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

- **Soft Power Concept:** Cultural heritage and traditions enhance a country's global influence. India uses Buddhism as a tool for diplomatic engagement with Asian countries.
- **Buddhist Diplomacy:** Shared Buddhist heritage strengthens ties with countries like Sri Lanka and Japan. It promotes mutual understanding and cooperation.
- **Global Engagement:** Hosting relic exhibitions attracts international attention. It positions India as a cultural and spiritual leader.
- **Strategic Importance:** Cultural diplomacy complements economic and political relations. It helps build long-term partnerships based on shared values.

Spiritual Tourism and Economic Potential

- **Tourism Growth:** Religious and spiritual tourism is a rapidly growing sector in India. It generates employment and boosts local economies.

- **Ladakh's Potential:** The region can emerge as a major Buddhist tourism destination. This will attract both domestic and international visitors.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** Improved connectivity and facilities are required to support tourism. Sustainable development is essential to preserve ecological balance.
- **Community Benefits:** Tourism provides livelihood opportunities for local communities. It also helps preserve cultural traditions and heritage.

Teachings of Buddha and Contemporary Relevance

- **Middle Path:** Buddha advocated moderation and balance in life. This principle is relevant in addressing modern societal conflicts.
- **Impermanence (Anitya):** Everything is transient and subject to change. This idea helps individuals cope with uncertainty and change.
- **Compassion and Peace:** Emphasis on non-violence and empathy. These values are crucial in a conflict-prone world.
- **Universal Brotherhood:** Promotes harmony and coexistence among all beings. It aligns with global ideals of peace and cooperation.

Way Forward

- **Heritage Preservation:** Strengthen efforts to protect and restore cultural assets. This ensures continuity of historical legacy.
- **Promotion of Cultural Tourism:** Develop Ladakh as a global spiritual destination. This requires integrated planning and marketing strategies.
- **Global Collaboration:** Engage with Buddhist countries for cultural exchange programmes. This will enhance India's soft power and global presence.
- **Awareness and Education:** Promote knowledge about Buddhist heritage and values. This can foster social harmony and cultural pride.

Conclusion

The arrival of the Piprahwa relics in Ladakh is not just a cultural event but a symbol of India's civilisational heritage. It reinforces the relevance of Buddha's teachings in today's world and highlights the role of cultural diplomacy in strengthening global ties.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Buddhism and relic traditions, consider the following statements:

1. The tradition of relic worship in Buddhism began after the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha.
2. Emperor Ashoka played no role in the spread of Buddhist relics.
3. Stupas were constructed to enshrine relics and serve as pilgrimage sites.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: a (1 only)

Basava Jayanti

Why in News: Recently, Basava Jayanti was celebrated.

Key Details

- It commemorates the birth anniversary of **Basavanna**, one of the most influential social reformers and spiritual thinkers of medieval India.
- Celebrated primarily in Karnataka and among the Lingayat community, the occasion highlights Basavanna's

contributions to social equality, ethical governance, and the Bhakti movement.

- The festival usually falls in the Hindu month of **Vaishakha** (April–May).

About Basavanna



- Basavanna (1105–1167 CE) was a philosopher, poet, administrator, and statesman in the court of King Bijjala of the Kalachuri dynasty.
- He is regarded as the founder or chief proponent of the **Lingayat/Veerashaiva movement**.
- He propagated the ideals of:
 - Equality and social justice
 - Dignity of labour
 - Gender equality
 - Rejection of caste hierarchy and ritualism

Key Teachings of Basavanna

1. Kayaka (Work as Worship)

- Basavanna emphasized that every form of honest labour is sacred.
- He rejected the notion of hereditary superiority based on caste.

2. Dasoha (Sharing of Wealth)

- Individuals should use their surplus wealth for the welfare of society.
- Encouraged compassion and social responsibility.

3. Social Equality

- Opposed untouchability and caste discrimination.
- Supported inter-caste interaction and social integration.

4. Spiritual Democracy

- Advocated direct personal devotion to Lord Shiva without priestly mediation.
- Promoted simple spiritual practices over-elaborate rituals.

Contribution to Literature

- Basavanna composed **Vachanas**, short Kannada poetic verses with deep philosophical and ethical messages.
- Vachana literature became a major contribution to Kannada literature and the Bhakti tradition.
- His writings focused on morality, devotion, and social reform.

Anubhava Mantapa

- Basavanna established the **Anubhava Mantapa**, often described as the world's first spiritual-social parliament.
- It served as a platform where men and women from all social backgrounds discussed spiritual and social issues.
- Promoted participatory dialogue and inclusiveness.

Relevance in Contemporary India

Social Justice

- Basavanna's teachings remain relevant in addressing caste discrimination and social inequality.

Inclusive Governance

- His emphasis on ethical administration and welfare-oriented governance aligns with constitutional values.

Gender Equality

- The Lingayat movement included women saints and thinkers, reflecting progressive social ideas.

Sustainable and Ethical Economy

- The concept of *Kayaka* promotes dignity of labour and productive economic participation.

Constitutional and Ethical Aspects

Basavanna's philosophy resonates with:

- **Article 14** – Equality before law
- **Article 15** – Prohibition of discrimination
- **Article 17** – Abolition of untouchability
- Fundamental Duties promoting harmony and fraternity

Challenges

- Commercialization and ritualization of celebrations may dilute reformist ideals.
- Persistent caste divisions continue to challenge Basavanna's vision of equality.
- Limited awareness of Vachana literature among younger generations.

Way Forward

- Integrate Basavanna's teachings into value-based education.
- Promote translation and digital preservation of Vachana literature.

- Encourage social harmony campaigns inspired by his egalitarian philosophy.
- Strengthen public discourse on dignity of labour and ethical governance.

Conclusion

Basava Jayanti is not merely a religious observance but a celebration of social reform, equality, and ethical living. The life and teachings of Basavanna continue to inspire India's democratic and constitutional aspirations toward justice, fraternity, and inclusive development.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Basavanna, consider the following statements:

1. He was associated with the Lingayat movement in medieval India.
2. He advocated the principles of *Kayaka* and *Dasoha*.
3. He supported rigid caste hierarchy as part of social order.
4. He composed philosophical verses known as *Vachanas*.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Answer: b

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana— III Extension

Why in News: The Union Government has approved the extension of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana Phase III to further strengthen rural road connectivity across India.

Key Details

- The extension is aimed at completing pending road projects, improving rural infrastructure, and enhancing last-mile connectivity in remote and aspirational regions.
- The move is significant in the context of inclusive development, rural economic transformation, and reduction of regional disparities.

PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY)

Building Roads, Connecting Communities, Transforming Rural India

Launched on 25 December 2000, PMGSY is a flagship programme of the Government of India under the Ministry of Rural Development to provide all-weather road connectivity to eligible unconnected habitations in rural areas.



PMGSY

सड़क से समृद्धि

OBJECTIVE: TO PROVIDE ALL-WEATHER ROAD CONNECTIVITY TO UNCONNECTED RURAL HABITATIONS

EVOLUTION OF PMGSY

PMGSY-I (2000-2012)



Focus on connecting unconnected habitations

- Plain areas: 500+ population
- Hilly, tribal & desert areas: 250+ population

PMGSY-II (2013-2018)



Focus on upgradation and consolidation of rural road network

PMGSY-III (2019 onwards)



Focus on connectivity to Gramin Agricultural Markets, Higher Secondary Schools and Hospitals and upgradation of through-routes and major rural links

KEY FEATURES



Provides all-weather connectivity to rural areas



Connects villages to markets, schools, hospitals and other important places



Boosts rural economy, employment and livelihoods



Promotes social inclusion and balanced regional development



Encourages use of green technologies and climate resilient roads

IMPACT OF PMGSY

- ✓ Better access to education and healthcare
- ✓ Increased agricultural productivity and market access
- ✓ Reduction in travel time and transportation cost
- ✓ Enhanced rural-urban connectivity
- ✓ Improved quality of life in rural areas

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

- Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
- National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (NRIDA)
- State Rural Roads Development Agencies (SRRDAs)
- Quality monitoring through independent agencies and technology-based systems (OMMAS, GIS)

SIGNIFICANCE



Drives rural economic growth



Improves access to schools and healthcare



Promotes social inclusion and equity



Strengthens connectivity and nation building



PMGSY – Paving the way for a connected, empowered and prosperous Rural India

About PMGSY

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana was launched on 25 December 2000 under the Ministry of Rural Development.

Objective

To provide all-weather road connectivity to eligible unconnected habitations in rural areas.

Implementing Ministry

- Ministry of Rural Development
- Implemented through the National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (NRIDA)

Evolution of PMGSY

PMGSY-I

Focused on:

- Connecting unconnected habitations
- Priority to rural areas with poor accessibility

Eligibility criteria:

- Plain areas: population of 500+
- Hilly, tribal and desert areas: population of 250+

PMGSY-II

Focused on:

- Upgradation and consolidation of existing rural road networks

- Improvement of rural transport efficiency

PMGSY-III

Approved in 2019 with emphasis on:

- Consolidation of through-routes and major rural links
- Connecting:
 - Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs)
 - Higher Secondary Schools
 - Hospitals

Target:

- Upgradation of approximately 1.25 lakh km of rural roads

Key Features of PMGSY-III Extension

1. Completion of Pending Projects

- Ensures unfinished rural road works are completed within revised timelines.
- Addresses delays caused by:
 - COVID-19 disruptions
 - Land acquisition issues
 - Rising construction costs

2. Focus on Rural Economic Connectivity

Roads will connect villages with:

- Agricultural mandis
- Storage facilities

- Educational institutions
- Healthcare centres

This supports rural livelihoods and market integration.

3. Inclusion of Aspirational and Border Areas

Special focus on:

- Left Wing Extremism affected districts
- Tribal regions
- Border villages
- Hilly and remote areas

4. Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

The extension encourages:

- Green technologies
- Use of waste plastic in roads
- Cold mix technology
- Disaster-resilient road construction

Significance of PMGSY-III Extension

Economic Significance

- Reduces transportation costs
- Improves rural market access
- Enhances agricultural supply chains
- Promotes non-farm employment

Social Significance

- Better access to schools and hospitals
- Improves mobility for women and elderly
- Reduces regional inequalities

Governance Significance

- Strengthens rural integration with development schemes
- Enhances delivery of public services
- Promotes balanced regional development

Challenges

1. Land Acquisition Issues

- Delays due to local disputes
- Difficult terrain in tribal and hilly areas

2. Maintenance Deficit

- Poor upkeep reduces road quality over time
- Need for sustainable maintenance funding

3. Environmental Concerns

- Road construction may affect fragile ecosystems
- Deforestation and soil erosion risks in hilly areas

4. Cost Escalation

- Rising prices of raw materials increase project costs

Government Initiatives for Better Implementation

- Use of GIS-based monitoring
- Online Management, Monitoring and Accounting System (OMMAS)
- Geo-tagging of projects
- Promotion of green road technologies

Way Forward

- Ensure timely completion through better coordination between Centre and States.
- Strengthen maintenance mechanisms through dedicated rural road funds.
- Promote eco-friendly and climate-resilient construction methods.
- Integrate PMGSY roads with rural economic corridors and digital infrastructure.
- Increase community participation in monitoring road quality.

Conclusion

The extension of PMGSY-III reflects the government's continued commitment to rural transformation and inclusive infrastructure development. Rural roads are not merely transport assets; they are instruments of social justice, economic integration, and balanced regional growth. Effective implementation of the scheme can significantly contribute to achieving the goals of rural prosperity and sustainable development.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Rural Road connectivity acts as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation." Discuss the significance of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in achieving inclusive rural development in India. (250 words, 15 marks)

Startup India fund of funds 2.0 (F.o.F 2.0)

Why in News: The Union Cabinet has approved the **Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 (FoF 2.0)** with a corpus of **₹10,000 crore**.

Key Details

- The scheme builds on the earlier **Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS 1.0)** launched in 2016 under the Startup India initiative.
- The new phase aims to address emerging gaps in **deep-tech funding, early-growth capital, and technology-driven manufacturing**, while mobilising long-term domestic venture capital.

About Fund of Funds (FoF) Mechanism

A **Fund of Funds** does not invest directly in startups. Instead:

- It invests in **SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)**
- These AIFs, in turn, invest in **DPIIT-recognised startups**
- Thus, public money acts as a **catalyst for private capital**

The **SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India)** serves as the implementing agency.

Key Features of FoF 2.0

1. Large Corpus and Long-Term Vision

- Total corpus: **₹10,000 crore**
- Designed to support **multi-year innovation cycles**
- Investments spread across **16th and 17th Finance Commission periods**

2. Focus on Deep-Tech and Strategic Sectors

Priority sectors include:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Robotics and Automation
- Space technology
- Semiconductors
- Biotechnology
- Clean energy and advanced manufacturing

3. Segmented Investment Strategy

Unlike FFS 1.0, FoF 2.0 adopts a **targeted approach**, focusing on:

- Deep-tech startups requiring patient capital
- Early-growth stage enterprises
- High-risk innovation-driven sectors

4. Indirect Capital Mobilisation

- Government does not directly fund startups
- Instead, it **crowds in private venture capital**

- AIFs are expected to invest **multiple times the government contribution**

5. Strengthening Domestic VC Ecosystem

- Reduces dependence on foreign capital
- Encourages growth of **domestic venture funds**
- Expands funding access beyond metro cities

Objectives of FoF 2.0

- Bridge “**high-risk capital gap**” in early-stage innovation
- Promote **Atmanirbhar innovation ecosystem**
- Strengthen India’s position in **global deep-tech race**
- Enable **job creation through startup scaling**
- Support **technology-driven industrial transformation**

Significance

1. Boost to Deep-Tech Ecosystem

India’s startups often face funding shortages in:

- Long-gestation technologies
- Capital-intensive innovation sectors

FoF 2.0 addresses this structural gap.

2. Multiplier Effect on Private Investment

By routing funds through AIFs, the scheme:

- Attracts institutional investors
- Amplifies total capital available for startups

3. Strengthening Startup India Mission

FoF 2.0 builds on the success of FFS 1.0, which supported over **1,300 startups** through multiple AIFs.

4. Regional Inclusion

- Encourages startup growth beyond Tier-1 cities
- Supports decentralised innovation hubs

Challenges

- **Delayed Returns:** Deep-tech investments require long gestation periods and high-risk tolerance.

- **Dependency on AIF Efficiency:** Success depends on the quality and governance of selected AIFs.
- **Risk of Capital Concentration:** Funds may still flow disproportionately to established startup hubs.
- **Exit Market Constraints:** India’s startup exit ecosystem (IPOs, acquisitions) remains evolving.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **AIF selection transparency and monitoring**
- Encourage **co-investment with global VC funds**
- Build **deep-tech research linkages with academia**
- Improve **startup exit mechanisms (IPO/acquisition ecosystem)**
- Promote **state-level innovation clusters**

Conclusion

The **Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0** marks a strategic shift from broad-based startup support to **focused deep-tech and innovation-driven financing**. By leveraging public capital to mobilise private investment, it aims to transform India into a **global innovation and technology powerhouse**.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to the Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 (FoF 2.0), consider the following statements:

1. It directly invests in DPIIT-recognised startups.
2. It operates through SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).
3. SIDBI is the implementing agency of the scheme.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

IMPORTANT REPORTS

India's core sectors performance

Why in News: The **Index of Eight Core Industries** shows a **0.4% contraction in March 2026**, reflecting an economic slowdown triggered by the **West Asia crisis** and supply disruptions.

Key Details

- The Index of Eight Core Industries recorded a **0.4% contraction in March**, marking the worst performance in 19 months due to the West Asia crisis.
- **Four out of eight sectors contracted**, with the fertilizer sector declining sharply by **24.6%** constraints in natural gas imports.
- Weak performance in **steel and cement** indicates a slowdown in construction and investment activity.
- The India Meteorological Department has forecast a **below-normal monsoon**, raising concerns over agriculture and rural demand.
- Rising inflation, global uncertainties, and stagnating incomes are increasing pressure on economic recovery.

Emerging Signs of Economic Slowdown

- Data is increasingly indicating a slowdown in the Index of Eight Core Industries due to the West Asia crisis.
- The March data, which is the first after the outbreak of conflict, shows a contraction of **0.4%** compared to the previous year.
- This marks the **worst performance in 19 months**, though it was largely anticipated.
- The slowdown reflects the immediate impact of global geopolitical tensions on India's economy.

Sector-wise Performance and Key Declines

- Out of the eight core sectors, **four sectors contracted**, one remained unchanged, and two recorded significant slowdowns.
- The **fertilizer sector** emerged as the worst performer with a sharp decline of **24.6%**.
- This decline is mainly due to disruptions in **natural gas imports**, which are essential for fertilizer production.
- Meanwhile, domestic natural gas output grew by **6.4%**, indicating uneven sectoral performance.

Impact on Agriculture and Infrastructure

- The agricultural sector faces additional stress due to predictions by the India Meteorological Department of a below-normal monsoon influenced by El Niño.
- A poor monsoon is likely to reduce crop output and weaken **rural demand**, which is already subdued.
- Slowdowns in **steel and cement production** indicate a decline in construction and infrastructure activity.
- Companies are delaying investments, reflecting weak business confidence.

Broader Economic Pressures

- Weak performance in sectors like **coal, crude oil, petroleum products, and electricity** has further dragged overall growth.
- The economy recorded its **lowest full-year growth in 2025–26 since the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- External factors such as supply disruptions, fuel shortages, and global uncertainty are key contributors.
- These trends highlight India's vulnerability due to its dependence on imports.

External Risks and Policy Challenges

- Much of the slowdown is **driven by external global factors**, including geopolitical conflicts and trade tensions.
- During the tenure of Narendra Modi, **earlier economic gains** were supported by low inflation and strong foreign investment.
- However, concerns over **trade frictions with Donald Trump** had already begun affecting investor confidence.
- Rising inflation and stagnant **household incomes** now pose serious challenges.
- The government must take **stronger measures** to restore economic growth and maintain India's image as a global economic bright spot.

Conclusion

India's economic slowdown reflects **growing vulnerability to global shocks** and structural weaknesses at home. External disruptions, combined with weak domestic demand and **inflationary pressures**, pose serious risks to sustained growth. The government must prioritise resilient supply chains, boost rural demand, and restore **investor confidence through stable policies**. Strengthening domestic capacity will be crucial to maintaining long-term economic stability and growth momentum.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "Discuss the impact of global geopolitical conflicts on India's core sector performance and economic growth. Suggest measures to enhance economic resilience." (150 words, 10 marks)

Earth Hour 2026

Why in News: India participated in **Earth Hour 2026** on **28 March 2026 (8:30 PM–9:30 PM)**, with iconic monuments such as India Gate, Qutub Minar, and Red Fort switching off non-essential lights in support of global climate action and environmental sustainability.

Key Details

- **Earth Hour** is a global environmental campaign organised by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
- Earth Hour 2026 marks **20 years** of the campaign since its launch in 2007.
- The 2026 theme is **"Give an Hour for Earth"**, encouraging individuals to dedicate time toward environmental protection and nature conservation.

- The movement began in **Sydney, Australia**, in 2007 as a symbolic “lights off” initiative against climate change.
- Today, Earth Hour is observed across **190+ countries and territories**, making it one of the world’s largest grassroots environmental movements.

Earth Hour – Meaning & Significance

- **Global Environmental Initiative:** Earth Hour is an international movement aimed at spreading awareness regarding **climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable living** through symbolic collective action.
- **Symbolic “Lights Off” Movement:** Individuals, institutions, governments, and businesses voluntarily switch off non-essential lights for one hour to demonstrate commitment toward environmental protection.
- **Mass Public Participation:** The campaign promotes citizen-led climate action and encourages behavioural change toward energy conservation and sustainability.
- **Beyond Symbolism:** Over the years, Earth Hour has evolved from a symbolic activity into a broader movement encouraging long-term environmental responsibility and climate resilience.

Origin & Evolution of Earth Hour

Beginning in Sydney (2007)

- Earth Hour began in **Sydney, Australia**, in 2007 as a local initiative led by WWF and environmental groups to raise awareness regarding excessive energy consumption and global warming.
- The campaign initially focused on switching off lights in homes and public spaces to symbolically reduce carbon emissions and highlight the urgency of climate action.

Expansion into a Global Movement

- Over time, Earth Hour transformed into one of the world’s largest environmental campaigns involving millions of participants globally.
- Major landmarks, cities, corporations, and institutions now participate annually, reflecting international solidarity on climate and sustainability concerns.

Theme of Earth Hour 2026 – “Give an Hour for Earth”

- The 2026 theme encourages people to move beyond merely switching off lights and actively dedicate **60 minutes to nature and environmental action**.
- The campaign promotes activities such as reconnecting with nature, restoring ecosystems, learning about biodiversity, and motivating others toward sustainable lifestyles.
- It reflects the growing recognition that climate action requires behavioural change, community participation, and ecological responsibility beyond symbolic gestures.

Participation in India

Role of WWF-India

- In India, Earth Hour has been coordinated by WWF-India since 2009, witnessing increasing public awareness and institutional participation.
- The initiative has expanded to more than **58 Indian cities**, involving schools, colleges, government institutions, businesses, and civil society organisations.

Participation of Iconic Monuments

- Major heritage structures and public landmarks switched off lights during Earth Hour 2026 to symbolically support climate action and sustainable development.
- This participation demonstrates how public institutions can play an important role in promoting environmental awareness and responsible energy use.

Activities Beyond “Lights Off”

Environmental Awareness Campaigns

- Earth Hour in India now includes activities such as **cleanliness drives, nature walks, awareness campaigns, and educational programmes** aimed at long-term ecological consciousness.
- These initiatives encourage citizens to adopt sustainable practices in daily life and strengthen environmental stewardship.

Citizen Science & Community Participation

- The campaign promotes citizen-led conservation activities including biodiversity monitoring, cyclothons, plantation drives, and local sustainability initiatives.
- Such community engagement strengthens grassroots participation in environmental governance and climate resilience.

Earth Hour & Climate Change

Climate Action Awareness

- Earth Hour highlights the urgent challenge of **global warming**, rising greenhouse gas emissions, and unsustainable patterns of consumption.
- It seeks to sensitise individuals and governments about the need for collective action to limit climate change impacts.

Energy Conservation

- The initiative symbolically promotes energy efficiency and responsible electricity consumption, which contribute to reducing carbon footprints.
- Although the one-hour switch-off has limited direct environmental impact, its real significance lies in behavioural transformation and awareness generation.

Earth Hour & Sustainable Development

Link with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Earth Hour supports several Sustainable Development Goals, including:

- **SDG 7:** Affordable and Clean Energy
- **SDG 11:** Sustainable Cities and Communities
- **SDG 12:** Responsible Consumption and Production
- **SDG 13:** Climate Action
- **SDG 15:** Life on Land

Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles

- The movement encourages environmentally responsible habits such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and protecting biodiversity.
- It reinforces the idea that sustainable development requires participation from governments, businesses, and ordinary citizens alike.

Importance of Grassroots Environmental Campaigns

Public Behavioural Change

- Environmental campaigns like Earth Hour create awareness and gradually influence societal behaviour toward eco-friendly lifestyles.

Global Education Monitoring Report 2026

Why in News: The **Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2026** was published by UNESCO.

Key Details

- The report assesses global progress towards **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)** ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.
- As the world approaches the **2030 deadline**, the report highlights both progress and persistent inequalities in education access, with a strong focus on **equity, inclusion, and system-wide reforms**.

Key Highlights of the GEM Report 2026

1. Global Education Status: Progress but incomplete inclusion:

- Around **273 million children and youth remain out of school globally**.
- Despite improvements since 2000, progress has **slowed after 2015**, especially in low-income regions.
- Global enrolment has increased significantly, yet **completion gaps remain large**, particularly in secondary education.

2. Expansion of Education Access

- Since 2000, enrolment has expanded across all levels:
 - Strong rise in **primary and secondary education access**
 - Significant growth in **pre-primary and tertiary education participation**
- However, expansion has not fully translated into **equitable completion outcomes**, especially in disadvantaged regions.

3. Equity as a Central Concern

The report highlights that inequality remains the biggest barrier to SDG 4:

- Children from **poor, rural, and conflict-affected regions** are disproportionately out of school.
- **Gender gaps have narrowed globally**, but regional disparities persist.
- Students with **disabilities and marginalized groups** continue to face systemic exclusion.

4. Policy Shifts towards Inclusion

- Many countries have introduced **inclusive education laws**, rising from negligible levels in 2000 to over one-fifth of countries today.
- Increased focus on:
 - **Equity-based financing**
 - Scholarships and conditional cash transfers
 - School feeding programmes
- Around **fewer than 1 in 10 countries** have a strong and comprehensive equity-oriented education system.

5. Learning and Completion Challenges

- Completion rates have improved:
 - Primary completion: ~88%
 - Lower secondary: ~78%
 - Upper secondary: ~61%
- However, at current trends, **universal upper secondary completion may not be achieved even by 2100**.
- **Key issues:**
 - Grade repetition
 - Late school entry

- Public participation strengthens democratic environmental governance and creates pressure for stronger climate policies.

Global Environmental Solidarity

- Earth Hour symbolises collective global responsibility toward protecting the planet despite differences in geography, economy, and development levels.
- It reflects the growing international consensus on the need for climate cooperation and ecological sustainability.

Challenges in Environmental Awareness Campaigns

- Symbolic campaigns may sometimes lack measurable long-term impact if not supported by policy action and behavioural changes.
- Climate awareness remains uneven, particularly in developing regions with limited environmental education.
- Consumerism and rapid urbanisation continue to increase ecological pressure despite growing awareness campaigns.
- Long-term environmental sustainability requires institutional reforms, technological innovation, and global cooperation.

Way Forward

- **Promote Environmental Education:** Integrate climate awareness and sustainability into school and community education programmes.
- **Encourage Sustainable Habits:** Citizens should adopt energy-efficient lifestyles, waste reduction, and responsible consumption practices.
- **Strengthen Climate Policies:** Governments must complement awareness campaigns with stronger climate action and renewable energy transitions.
- **Enhance Community Participation:** Local environmental initiatives and citizen-led conservation programmes should be encouraged for long-term ecological resilience.

Conclusion

Earth Hour 2026 highlights the growing global recognition that climate change and environmental degradation require collective action. While the symbolic “lights off” movement raises awareness, its larger significance lies in promoting sustainable lifestyles, ecological responsibility, and global environmental solidarity. Long-term environmental protection depends not only on governments and institutions but also on conscious citizen participation and behavioural transformation.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Earth Hour is organised globally by which of the following organisations?

- (a) UNEP
- (b) Greenpeace
- (c) WWF
- (d) UNESCO

Answer: (c)

Descriptive Question

Q. Discuss the significance of Earth Hour as a global environmental awareness campaign in promoting climate action and sustainable development. (150 Words, 10 Marks)

- Learning poverty in foundational literacy and numeracy

6. Emerging Global Trends

- Expansion of **digital education tools**, though unequal access remains a concern.
- Growing emphasis on **data-driven governance of education systems**.
- Increased integration of **education with health, nutrition, and social protection policies**.

Major Challenges Identified

1. Persistent Out-of-School Population

- Millions still excluded due to poverty, conflict, displacement, and child labour.

2. Inequality within Systems

- Urban–rural divide
- Gender-based disparities in certain regions
- Socio-economic inequality in access to quality education

3. Financing Gaps

- Many low-income countries underinvest in public education systems.
- Inefficient allocation of resources limits equity outcomes.

4. Weak Monitoring Systems

- Data gaps in disability, migration, and learning outcomes hinder targeted interventions.

Way Forward

1. Strengthening Equity-Focused Policies

- Targeted support for **marginalised and vulnerable groups**
- Expansion of **inclusive education systems**

2. Increasing Public Investment

- Higher and more efficient education financing
- Prioritising foundational learning outcomes

3. Improving Data Systems

- Better disaggregated data on gender, disability, and socio-economic status

4. Enhancing Foundational Learning

- Focus on literacy and numeracy in early grades
- Reducing dropout and repetition rates

5. Global Cooperation

- Stronger international collaboration to support SDG 4 progress in low-income and conflict-affected countries

Conclusion

The GEM Report 2026 underscores a critical message: the world has made significant progress in expanding education access, but **equity remains the defining challenge of the SDG 4 agenda**. As the 2030 deadline approaches, the focus must shift from mere enrolment to **inclusive, quality, and outcome-based education systems** that leave no learner behind.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2026, consider the following statements:

1. Around 273 million children and youth are still out of school globally.
2. The report states that universal upper secondary completion is likely to be achieved before 2030.
3. Equity is identified as a central challenge in achieving SDG 4.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a)

QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026

Why in News: The **QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026** was released by Quacquarelli Symonds.

Key Details

- It evaluates over **21,000 academic programmes across 1,900+ universities in 100 countries**, covering **55 individual subjects grouped into five broad disciplines** Arts & Humanities, Engineering & Technology, Life Sciences & Medicine, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences & Management.
- The rankings are based on indicators such as **academic reputation, employer reputation, research citations, and institutional collaboration**, reflecting global competitiveness in higher education.

Key Features of QS Subject Rankings 2026

1. Expanded Coverage

- 55 subject areas across disciplines
- Over 300 new institutional entries
- Increasing participation from emerging economies, especially Asia

2. Methodological Pillars

QS uses a combination of:

- Academic reputation survey (global scholars' perception)
- Employer reputation survey (graduate employability)
- Research impact (citations per paper, h-index)
- International research collaboration

Global Trends in 2026 Rankings

1. Dominance of Elite Universities

- Universities like **Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Cambridge, and Stanford** continue to dominate across multiple subjects.
- MIT leads globally in multiple engineering and science disciplines.

2. Rise of Asia

- Strong improvement in **Southern and South-Eastern Asia**
- National University of Singapore (NUS) and Chinese universities show upward mobility
- India shows record representation and improvement in rankings (599 entries across subjects)

3. Regional Shifts

- Southern Asia: highest improvement rate (~40–45% subjects rising)
- East Asia: highest number of new entrants but mixed performance
- Western countries still dominate top 10 positions across most disciplines

Subject-Wise Highlights

Engineering & Technology

- MIT remains the global leader
- Strong competition from Stanford, ETH Zurich, Oxford, Cambridge
- Asia's presence increasing (NUS, NTU Singapore)

Natural Sciences

- Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Cambridge dominate
- Growing participation of Chinese institutions like Tsinghua University

Life Sciences & Medicine

- Harvard, Oxford, Johns Hopkins lead globally

- UCL and Imperial College London remain strong European performers

Social Sciences & Management

- Harvard, Oxford, Stanford dominate
- LSE continues to maintain strong global standing

Arts & Humanities

- Oxford leads globally
- Strong US presence (Harvard, Yale, Columbia, NYU)

India's Performance

1. Record Participation

- India has **record representation across subjects**
- Significant improvement in engineering, management, and emerging disciplines

2. Key Institutions

- IITs dominate engineering subjects
- IIMs perform strongly in management fields
- Institutions like JNU, BITS Pilani, IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay feature in global top brackets

3. Positive Trends

- Increased global visibility of Indian institutions
- Strong rise in citations and research output
- Growing employability recognition in global markets

Significance for India

1. Higher Education Quality Benchmarking

- Rankings act as external evaluation of India's higher education reforms (NEP 2020 context)

2. Research Ecosystem Development

- Emphasis on publication quality, citations, and global collaboration

3. Soft Power Enhancement

- Higher global rankings improve India's educational diplomacy and attractiveness for foreign students

4. Policy Implications

- Need for:
 - Increased R&D investment
 - Faculty recruitment reforms
 - Industry-academia collaboration
 - Internationalisation of higher education

Challenges Highlighted

- Limited presence in top 50 across non-engineering disciplines
- Research output concentration in select elite institutions
- Infrastructure and funding gaps in many universities
- Need for stronger interdisciplinary research ecosystem

Way Forward

- Strengthen **National Research Foundation (NRF)** initiatives
- Expand global partnerships and joint degrees
- Improve citation impact through quality-focused research
- Enhance autonomy of higher education institutions
- Promote multidisciplinary education under NEP 2020

Conclusion

- The QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026 highlight a **gradually diversifying global academic landscape**, where Western universities continue to dominate but **Asia—and particularly India—is steadily improving its footprint**.
 - For India, the rankings signal both progress and the urgent need for sustained reforms to transform higher education into a globally competitive system.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026:

1. It evaluates universities based only on research citations and excludes reputation-based indicators.
2. It covers 55 subject areas grouped into five broad disciplines.
3. The rankings include both academic and employer reputation as indicators.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

Personalities in News

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Why in News: On April 14, 2026, India celebrated the birth anniversary of B. R. Ambedkar.

Key Details

- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, was one of the most influential social

reformers, jurists, economists, and political thinkers of modern India.

- His contributions to social justice, constitutionalism, democracy, and the upliftment of marginalized communities continue to shape Indian polity and governance.

PANCHTEERTH

Five Sacred Sites Associated with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

"These places are not just physical locations, but milestones in the life and mission of Babasaheb."
— Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

1. JANMABHOOMI
Mhow, Madhya Pradesh



The birthplace of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 14 April 1891.

Significance: The place where the journey of a great reformer began.

3. DIKSHABHOOMI
Nagpur, Maharashtra



The place where Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on 14 October 1956 along with lakhs of followers.

Significance: A symbol of social revolution, equality and a new beginning.

2. SHIKSHABHOOMI
London (UK)



Where Dr. Ambedkar pursued higher studies at the London School of Economics.

Significance: Represents the pursuit of knowledge and academic excellence.

PANCHTEERTH

In 1956, Dr. Ambedkar identified five places that hold special significance in his life. He called them his Panchteerth. These places reflect his journey of struggle, knowledge, and the mission of social transformation.

4. CHAITYABHOOMI
Dadar, Mumbai, Maharashtra



The place where Dr. Ambedkar attained Mahaparinirvana on 6 December 1956.

Significance: A place of reverence and inspiration for millions.

5. MAHAPARINIRVAN STHAL
Delhi



26, Alipur Road, Delhi – the last residence of Dr. Ambedkar and the place where he wrote his last words.

Significance: Reminds us of his tireless work until his last breath.

THE MESSAGE OF PANCHTEERTH

- Inspiration from his life
- Commitment to education
- Struggle for equality
- Adoption of Buddhism
- Service to humanity

"My birth may be in India, but my vision is for the whole world. I will not die as a Hindu."
— Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Educate, Agitate, Organize

Buddha and His Dhamma

Be a Good Human

Early Life and Education

- Born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow (present-day Madhya Pradesh).
- Belonged to the Mahar community, which faced severe caste discrimination.
- Despite social barriers, he pursued higher education abroad:
 - Studied at Columbia University
 - Studied at London School of Economics
- Earned doctorates in economics and law.

His educational achievements symbolized the transformative power of education in challenging social inequality.

Major Contributions

1. Architect of the Indian Constitution

Dr. Ambedkar served as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly.

Key Constitutional Contributions

- Ensured inclusion of:
 - Fundamental Rights

- Equality before law
- Abolition of untouchability (Article 17)
- Constitutional remedies
- Protection of minorities and weaker sections

Advocated:

- Parliamentary democracy
- Federalism
- Independent judiciary
- Rule of law

He emphasized **constitutional morality** as the foundation of democratic governance.

2. Champion of Social Justice

Ambedkar fought against:

- Untouchability
- Caste discrimination
- Social exclusion
- Gender inequality

Major Movements Led

- Mahad Satyagraha (1927) for access to public water tanks

- Temple entry movements
- Campaigns for Dalit political representation

He believed that:

“Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of its social democracy.”

3. Advocate of Economic and Labour Reforms

As Labour Member in the Viceroy’s Executive Council, Ambedkar introduced reforms such as:

- Reduction in working hours
- Maternity benefits
- Employee welfare measures
- Support for industrialization and planned economic development

Economic Ideas

- State socialism in key sectors
- Land reforms
- Water resource management
- Financial federalism

He also contributed ideas that later influenced the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India.

4. Contribution to Women’s Rights

Ambedkar strongly supported gender equality.

Hindu Code Bill

He attempted reforms related to:

- Women’s inheritance rights
- Divorce rights
- Property rights

Although the bill initially faced resistance, many of its principles were later incorporated into Indian laws.

5. Conversion to Buddhism

In 1956, Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with lakhs of followers.

Significance

- Rejection of caste oppression
- Search for equality and dignity
- Promotion of rationalism and humanism

This movement gave rise to the modern Navayana Buddhist movement in India.

Ambedkar’s Vision of Democracy

Political Democracy

- Universal adult franchise
- Representative government
- Constitutional methods

Social Democracy

He emphasized on:

- Liberty
- Equality
- Fraternity

These principles were inspired partly by Buddhism and modern democratic ideals.

Relevance in Contemporary India

1. Social Justice Policies

Ambedkar’s ideas continue to influence:

- Reservation policies
- Welfare measures
- Rights-based governance

2. Constitutional Governance

His emphasis on constitutional morality is important in debates regarding:

- Judicial independence
- Federalism
- Civil liberties
- Institutional accountability

3. Inclusive Development

His vision remains relevant in addressing:

- Caste discrimination
- Educational inequality
- Economic exclusion
- Gender injustice

Criticism and Challenges

Some scholars argue:

- Reservation alone cannot eliminate caste inequality.
- Social transformation has been slower than expected.
- Economic inequalities continue despite constitutional safeguards.

However, Ambedkar’s framework still provides a constitutional pathway for reform and inclusion.

Conclusion

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was not merely the architect of the Constitution but also a visionary who sought to transform India into a society based on justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity. His ideas continue to guide India’s democratic and constitutional journey.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, consider the following statements:

1. He was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly.
2. He supported the Hindu Code Bill for women’s rights.
3. He founded the Reserve Bank of India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a)

Descriptive Question

Q. “Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision of social democracy remains unfinished in contemporary India.” Discuss. (250 words)

Mangal Pandey

Why in News: Recently, Martyrdom Day of Mangal Pandey was observed on 8th April.

Key Details

- Mangal Pandey was an Indian sepoy in the 34th Bengal Native Infantry of the East India Company.
- He is regarded as one of the earliest freedom fighters who played a significant role in triggering the Revolt of 1857, often called the “First War of Indian Independence.”

Early Life

- Born on **19 July 1827** in **Ballia district** (present-day Uttar Pradesh).
- Belonged to a Brahmin family.
- Joined the army of the East India Company as a sepoy.



Immediate Cause of Revolt

The controversy over the newly introduced **Enfield rifle cartridges** became the immediate trigger.

Cartridge Controversy

- Soldiers had to bite open rifle cartridges before loading them.
- Rumours spread that the cartridges were greased with:
 - Cow fat (offensive to Hindus)
 - Pig fat (offensive to Muslims)

This created widespread resentment among Indian soldiers and intensified existing grievances against British rule.

Barrackpore Incident (1857)

- On **29 March 1857**, at the military cantonment in Barrackpore, Mangal Pandey attacked British officers.
- He fired upon British sergeants and encouraged fellow sepoys to revolt.
- Though many soldiers hesitated, the incident exposed growing anger within the army.
- He was arrested after the confrontation.

Execution

- Mangal Pandey was sentenced to death by the British authorities.
- He was executed on **8 April 1857**.
- His actions became an inspiration for the larger revolt that spread across North India in May 1857.

Significance of Mangal Pandey

Symbol of Resistance

- Became a symbol of bravery and anti-colonial resistance.

Inspiration for Nationalism

- Inspired later generations of freedom fighters.

Prelude to Mass Revolt

- His rebellion acted as a precursor to the widespread uprising of 1857.

National Memory

- Remembered in textbooks, films, stamps, and memorials across India.

Legacy of Mangal Pandey

- Numerous roads, parks, and institutions are named after him.
- His life was depicted in the movie *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* starring Aamir Khan.
- He remains an enduring icon of patriotism in India.

Conclusion

Mangal Pandey occupies a crucial place in Indian history as one of the earliest figures to openly challenge British authority. Though his rebellion was localized, it ignited a larger movement

that shook colonial rule and laid the foundation for India's long struggle for independence.

Guru Tegh Bahadur

Why in News: Recently, the Prime Minister of India offered homage to Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, a towering spiritual great of our civilization, on the sacred occasion of Parkash Purab.

Key Details

- Guru Tegh Bahadur was the ninth Guru of Sikhism and one of the greatest defenders of religious liberty in Indian history.
- Revered as **“Hind di Chadar” (Shield of India)**, he sacrificed his life in 1675 to protect the religious freedom of Kashmiri Pandits during the Mughal period.
- **His life symbolized:**
 - Courage against tyranny
 - Spiritual wisdom
 - Protection of human dignity
 - Secular and pluralistic values

Early Life

Birth and Family

- Born in 1621 at Amritsar.
- Original name: **Tyag Mal**.
- Son of the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind.
- Received the title **“Tegh Bahadur”** (Brave Swordsman) for his valor in battle.

Spiritual Orientation

- Known for deep meditation and ascetic temperament.
- Combined spirituality with the Sikh tradition of resistance against injustice.

Historical Background

Mughal Policies under Aurangzeb

During the reign of Aurangzeb:

- Religious orthodoxy increased.
- Cases of forced conversions and persecution were reported in some regions.
- Kashmiri Pandits sought protection from Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur

Defense of Religious Freedom

- Guru Tegh Bahadur stood against forced religious conversion.
- He asserted that every individual had the right to practice their own faith.

Execution

- Arrested on the orders of Aurangzeb.
- Publicly executed in Delhi in 1675 at Chandni Chowk. Today, the site is marked by Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib.

Historical Significance

His martyrdom is considered:

- A landmark event in the history of human rights.
- A defense not merely of Sikhism, but of universal freedom of conscience.

Contributions and Teachings

Spiritual Teachings

Guru Tegh Bahadur emphasized:



- Detachment from materialism
- Fearlessness
- Compassion
- Equality of all human beings
- Devotion to God

His hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Important Teachings

Theme	Core Idea
Fearlessness	Stand against injustice without fear
Religious Freedom	Respect all faiths
Equality	Reject caste and discrimination
Spiritual Discipline	Balance worldly duties with spirituality
Sacrifice	Uphold truth even at personal cost

Impact on Sikh History

Rise of Sikh Resistance

The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur deeply influenced his son, Guru Gobind Singh.

This later contributed to:

- Militarization of the Sikh community
- Formation of the Khalsa in 1699
- Strengthening resistance against oppression

Guru Tegh Bahadur and Constitutional Values

His life resonates with modern Indian constitutional ideals:

- Freedom of religion (Article 25)
- Secularism

- Human dignity
- Protection of minorities

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur is remembered not only as a Sikh Guru but also as a universal symbol of liberty and justice.

Important Places Associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur

Place	Importance
Amritsar	Birthplace region and early life
Anandpur Sahib	Major center of Sikh activity
Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib	Site of martyrdom
Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib	Cremation site

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. With reference to Guru Tegh Bahadur, consider the following statements:

1. He was the ninth Sikh Guru.
2. He was the son of Guru Arjan Dev.
3. His hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

MISCELLANEOUS

Tourism and trade

Why in News: The ₹92,000 crore **Great Nicobar Island project** is in news due to its rapid progress, draft master plan notification, and rising concerns over ecology, tribal rights, and strategic implications.

Key Details

- Mega project to develop **port-led and tourism economy** on Great Nicobar Island.
- Includes **ICTP, airport, power plants, and tourism infrastructure**.
- Targets **3.36 lakh population and 1 million tourists annually by 2055**.
- Concerns over **Nicobarese and Shompen tribal displacement and forest rights**.
- Facing **legal, environmental, and strategic debates** despite government push.

Project Overview and Recent Momentum

- The Union government's ₹92,000 crore mega project aims at **holistic development of Great Nicobar Island (GNI)**.
- Focus is on transforming the island into a **port-led and tourism-driven economy**.
- The project has **accelerated significantly in the last six months**.
- Despite progress, **concerns persist over ecological damage and tribal rights**.

Key Infrastructure and Development Plans

- The draft master plan includes:
 - **International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP)**
 - **Greenfield airport and power plants**
- Envisions GNI as a **pristine seaside tourism destination**.
- Promotes **business, adventure, biodiversity, and entertainment tourism**.
- Also includes **social infrastructure** like healthcare, education, and livelihoods.

Economic Potential and Population Projections

- Targets a **population of over 3.36 lakh by 2055** (current ~10,000).
- Expected **tourist inflow: ~1 million annually**.
- Over **70% of jobs** projected in tourism and allied sectors.
- Strategic use of location near the **Malacca Strait** to boost **global maritime trade share**.

Concerns Over Tribal Rights and Governance Issues

- Indigenous groups - **Nicobarese and Shompen** - fear **displacement and loss of rights**.
- Confusion due to **contradictory relocation plans** in different drafts.
- Allegations that **forest rights remain unsettled since 2022**.
- Lack of clarity on **public consultation timeline** raises transparency concerns.

Environmental, Legal, and Strategic Debate

- Project may **irreversibly impact ecology and biodiversity** of GNI.
- Though the **National Green Tribunal** cited **strategic importance**, concerns remain.
- Legal challenge is ongoing in the **Calcutta High Court**.
- Experts question **commercial and naval viability**.
- A **broader consensus and cautious approach** is essential before proceeding.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar project reflects India's ambition to enhance **strategic and economic capabilities**. However, unresolved issues of **ecological sustainability, tribal rights, and transparency** pose serious challenges. A balanced approach involving **inclusive consultation, environmental safeguards, and long-term viability assessment** is essential to ensure that development does not come at the cost of **irreversible social and ecological damage**.

EXPECTED QUESTION FOR UPSC CSE

Descriptive Question

Q. "The Great Nicobar Island development project reflects a conflict between strategic-economic ambitions and environmental-tribal concerns." Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words)

Constitutional Morality vs Faith

Why in News: The Centre argued before the Supreme Court that **public morality—not constitutional morality—should govern matters of faith**, in the ongoing review of the **Sabarimala Temple Entry case**.

Key Details

- The Centre challenged the "**essential religious practices (ERP) test**", calling it unworkable in India's diverse religious context.
- Debate revolves around **Articles 25 and 26**, balancing religious freedom with equality and reform.
- The 2018 judgment allowed entry of women of all ages into Sabarimala temple.
- The issue is under review by a **9-judge Constitution Bench** to settle broader constitutional questions.

Constitutional Provisions: Articles 25 & 26

- **Freedom of Religion (Article 25):** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to **public order, morality, and health**.
- **Denominational Rights (Article 26):** Religious denominations have the right to **manage their own affairs in matters of religion**, including rituals and administration.
- **Reasonable Restrictions:** Both Articles are not absolute; the state can intervene for **social reform and welfare**, as seen in temple entry legislations.
- **Judicial Interpretation:** Courts have often balanced individual rights with group rights, making religious freedom a **dynamic constitutional domain**.

Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine

- **Origin in Shirur Mutt Case (1954):** The Supreme Court held that only **essential practices of a religion** are protected under the Constitution.
- **Judicial Determination Issue:** Courts decide what constitutes “essential,” leading to criticism that judges are **interpreting theology**, not law.
- **Centre’s Critique:** The government argues ERP is **inconsistent and impractical**, especially in a country with vast religious diversity.
- **Recent Developments:** The current bench is reconsidering whether ERP should continue or be replaced with a more **rights-based approach**.

Public Morality vs Constitutional Morality

- **Constitutional Morality:** Refers to adherence to **core constitutional values** like equality, liberty, and dignity, as emphasized in several Supreme Court judgments.
- **Public Morality (Centre’s View):** Reflects **societal values, traditions, and collective conscience**, which may differ across regions and communities.
- **Conflict in Practice:** In the Sabarimala case, constitutional morality supported **gender equality**, while public morality was cited to justify traditional exclusion.
- **Critical Debate:** Over-reliance on public morality may risk **majoritarianism**, while strict constitutional morality may ignore cultural sensitivities.

Religious Denomination & Autonomy

- **Definition Challenge:** Determining what constitutes a “religious denomination” in India is complex due to **plurality within religions**.
- **Sabarimala Issue:** Whether Ayyappa devotees form a separate denomination affects their right to **exclude certain groups**.
- **Legal Precedents:** In the **Venkataramana Devaru Case (1958)**, the Court allowed denominational control but restricted exclusion from temple entry.
- **Balancing Autonomy & Equality:** Absolute autonomy may lead to **discrimination**, while excessive state interference may violate religious freedom.

Gender Justice and Social Reform

- **2018 Judgment Significance:** The Supreme Court struck down the ban on entry of women (10–50 years), terming it **violative of equality (Article 14)**.
- **Women’s Rights Perspective:** The case is seen as a milestone for **gender justice and dignity**, challenging patriarchal norms in religious practices.
- **Resistance and Protests:** Implementation faced strong opposition, highlighting the gap between **judicial decisions and societal acceptance**.
- **Broader Implication:** Raises questions on how far the state should intervene in **religious customs for social reform**.

Contemporary Debate: Swadeshi Constitutional Interpretation

- **Indigenous Jurisprudence Argument:** The Centre advocated a **“Swadeshi” approach**, grounding interpretation in India’s civilizational ethos rather than Western principles.
- **Pluralism and Diversity:** India’s religious diversity makes uniform standards difficult, requiring **context-sensitive adjudication**.
- **Risk of Fragmentation:** Excessive recognition of denominational autonomy may lead to **social divisions and exclusionary practices**.
- **Need for Balance:** A middle path is required that respects both **constitutional values and cultural diversity**.

Way Forward

- **Refining the ERP Doctrine:** Shift towards a **rights-centric approach**, focusing on whether a practice violates fundamental rights rather than its religious essentiality.
- **Promoting Constitutional Morality:** Strengthen awareness of **equality, dignity, and fraternity** through civic education and judicial consistency.
- **Contextual Interpretation:** Courts should adopt a **balanced approach**, considering both cultural practices and constitutional principles.
- **Inclusive Religious Practices:** Encourage reforms within religious communities to ensure **gender justice and social inclusion**.
- **Dialogue-Based Resolution:** Promote engagement between state, judiciary, and religious groups to reduce conflict and enhance legitimacy.

Conclusion

The Sabarimala issue reflects the broader challenge of balancing **faith, rights, and constitutional values** in a diverse society. While religious freedom is essential, it cannot override the principles of equality and dignity. The Indian Constitution remains a **living document**, requiring continuous interpretation to harmonise tradition with modern democratic ideals.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS FOR UPSC CSE

Prelims MCQ

Q. The “Essential Religious Practices” doctrine was evolved in which case?

- (a) Kesavananda Bharati
- (b) Shirur Mutt Case
- (c) Minerva Mills
- (d) S.R. Bommai

Answer: (b)

Descriptive Question

Q. “The debate between public morality and constitutional morality lies at the heart of religious freedom in India.” Discuss with reference to the Sabarimala case. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Daily MCQs from The Hindu & Indian Express

(April 2026)

Daily MCQs Practice

Q1. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of El Niño?

1. It refers to the abnormal warming of surface waters in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.
2. It strengthens the trade winds across the equatorial Pacific.
3. It is associated with reduced monsoon rainfall in India.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 & 3

Q2. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.

Statement 2: This provision is intended to ensure the independence of the Election Commission from executive interference.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding India's neighbourhood policy and regional trade dynamics:

1. India's neighbourhood policy has traditionally been driven by a purely economic rationale without geopolitical considerations.
2. Greater regional trade integration can help offset global uncertainties arising from fragmentation of the global trading system.
3. Non-tariff barriers and weak connectivity infrastructure have constrained India's trade potential with its neighbours.

Which of the statements given above are incorrect?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q4. With reference to gender verification in sports and international regulations, consider the following statements:

1. The International Olympic Committee mandates gender eligibility rules for female categories based solely on chromosomal testing such as the SRY gene.
2. Hyperandrogenism regulations in sports have been legally challenged at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.
3. Scientific consensus unequivocally establishes that higher natural testosterone always guarantees superior athletic performance in all sports.

4. Gender verification policies in sports raise concerns related to privacy, dignity, and discrimination.

Which of the statements given above are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Q5. With reference to the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia and their global implications, consider the following statements:

1. Closure of the Strait of Hormuz affects only oil supply and has negligible impact on global fertiliser and semiconductor industries.
2. Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supply disruptions in the Gulf region can significantly affect energy security of countries like India, Japan, and South Korea.
3. The United Nations Security Council is always able to take binding and timely decisions in major global conflicts due to absence of veto constraints.
4. Prolonged disruption in maritime trade chokepoints can lead to both inflationary pressures and slowdown in global economic growth.

Which of the statements given above are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1 and 4 only

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding exchange rate dynamics and central bank intervention:

1. Depreciation of the rupee automatically improves the current account balance irrespective of global conditions.
2. A rise in crude oil prices tends to widen India's current account deficit.
3. Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) outflows can exert downward pressure on the domestic currency.
4. Central bank intervention in the forex market always aims to defend a specific exchange rate level.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q7. Consider the following with reference to Enforcement Directorate (ED):

1. The ED functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. It enforces the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for criminal offences.
3. It is a constitutional body established by the Constitution of India.

How many of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q8. The Persian Gulf is connected to the Arabian Sea through:

- (a) Suez Canal
- (b) Strait of Malacca
- (c) Strait of Hormuz
- (d) Bosphorus Strait

Q9. Consider the following statements:

1. The removal of the Chief Election Commissioner is similar to that of a Supreme Court judge.
2. Other Election Commissioners can be removed by the President on the recommendation of the CEC.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q10. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Israel's climate:

1. Israel has a Mediterranean climate along its coastal region.
2. The southern region is largely arid and desert-like.
3. The entire country experiences uniform rainfall throughout the year.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q11. Consider the following statements regarding digital governance and IT Rules in India:

1. Advisories issued by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology are legally equivalent to rules framed under statutory law.
2. Regulatory uncertainty in digital platforms can increase transaction costs and affect investment decisions in the economy.
3. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 aims to regulate personal data processing and may impose compliance costs on firms.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q12. With reference to India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for smartphones, consider the following statements:

1. The scheme was designed with a primary focus on integrating India into global value chains through exports.
2. The PLI scheme initially prioritized upstream component manufacturing over final assembly.
3. Reduction in import duties on key electronic components supported the competitiveness of smartphone manufacturing.
4. The success of the smartphone PLI has been uniformly replicated across all sectors where PLI has been implemented.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two

- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q13. With reference to air pollution mitigation strategies in urban India, consider the following statements:

1. Bharat Stage VI norms are equivalent to Euro VI standards and aim to significantly reduce vehicular emissions.
2. The 'No PUC, No Fuel' policy is a statutory nationwide mandate under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.
3. Intelligent Traffic Management Systems (ITMS) can help reduce air pollution by minimizing vehicular congestion and idle emissions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q14. Consider the following statements with reference to inflation dynamics in India:

1. A sustained rise in global crude oil prices can lead to cost-push inflation in India.
2. El Niño conditions generally improve agricultural output in India, thereby reducing inflationary pressures.
3. When inflation moves above the tolerance band, the Reserve Bank of India is more likely to increase policy interest rates.
4. Lower inflation always leads to higher borrowing costs in the economy.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q15. INS Aridhaman is primarily a:

- (a) Diesel-electric submarine
- (b) Nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine
- (c) Nuclear-powered attack submarine
- (d) Conventional patrol submarine

Q16. Which of the following best describes the objective of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)?

- (a) To promote uniform national policies with state flexibility
- (b) To increase fiscal deficit of states
- (c) To replace state schemes entirely
- (d) To centralize all governance functions

Q17. With reference to the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, consider the following statements:

1. It provides for one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
2. The reservation will come into effect immediately after the enactment of the Act.
3. The implementation of reservation is linked with the process of delimitation after the first Census conducted post-2026.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q18. With reference to climate change and energy security, consider the following statements:

1. Transition to renewable energy can reduce a country's vulnerability to geopolitical disruptions in fossil fuel supply.
2. Climate change has no significant impact on global economic factors such as inflation and supply chains.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q19. Consider the following with reference to MCX:

1. It is India's largest commodity derivatives exchange.
2. It deals only in agricultural commodities.
3. It is regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

How many of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q20. Which principle is followed by the Paris Agreement?

- (a) Polluter Pays Principle
- (b) Absolute Equality Principle
- (c) Common But Differentiated Responsibilities
- (d) Precautionary Principle

Q21. With reference to the role and recommendations of the Finance Commission of India, consider the following statements:

1. Grants under Article 275 of the Constitution are statutory in nature and charged on the Consolidated Fund of India.
2. Grants under Article 282 are discretionary and can be given by both the Union and the States for any public purpose.
3. The Finance Commission is constitutionally mandated to recommend grants directly to local bodies independent of States.
4. The divisible pool of taxes includes all cesses and surcharges collected by the Union government.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q22. Consider the following statements with reference to air pollution mitigation strategies in urban areas:

1. Reducing emissions at source is considered more effective than end-of-pipe solutions like smog towers.
2. Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) emission standards are applicable only to diesel vehicles in India.
3. Electrification of public transport helps in reducing both vehicular emissions and urban air pollution levels.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q23. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: The National Green Tribunal was established for effective and expeditious disposal of environmental cases.

Statement II: It was set up under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

Statement III: It has jurisdiction over cases related to environmental protection and conservation of forests.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q24. The Dengue virus belongs to which family?

- (a) Retroviridae
- (b) Flaviviridae
- (c) Herpesviridae
- (d) Orthomyxoviridae

Q25. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Bauxite distribution in India?

1. Odisha is the largest producer of bauxite in India.
2. Jharkhand has significant deposits of bauxite.
3. Bauxite deposits are mostly found in alluvial plains.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q26. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) is responsible for weather forecasting and cyclone warnings in India.

Statement 2: IMD operates under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q27. Consider the following statements:

1. India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirements and has been actively diversifying its sources of supply.
2. Venezuela was among the top five crude oil suppliers to India prior to the imposition of US sanctions in 2019.
3. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical chokepoint for India's oil imports from West Asia.
4. Venezuelan crude is lighter in nature and produces lower quantities of middle distillates like diesel.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q28. Which of the following countries border the Strait of Hormuz?

1. Iran
2. Oman
3. United Arab Emirates
4. Saudi Arabia

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q29. Consider the following statements:

1. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India primarily deals with controlling inflation while supporting economic growth.
2. Stagflation refers to a situation of high economic growth along with high inflation.
3. Supply-side shocks such as a rise in global crude oil prices can limit the effectiveness of monetary policy in controlling inflation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q30. Consider the following statements with reference to women's representation in India:

1. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam provides for reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
2. The implementation of women's reservation is contingent upon a delimitation exercise to be undertaken after the next Census.
3. The Constitution of India originally provided reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q31. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: Fast Breeder Reactors are designed to produce more fissile material than they consume.

Statement II: They use fast neutrons and do not require a moderator.

Statement III: They commonly use liquid and solid both sodium as a coolant.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q32. Consider the following with reference to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII):

1. It is a non-government, not-for-profit industry-led organisation.

2. It works to create and sustain an environment conducive to industrial growth.

3. It is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament.

How many of the above is/are not correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q33. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Iran and surrounding seas?

1. Iran is bordered by the Caspian Sea to the north.
2. The Persian Gulf lies to the south of Iran.
3. Iran has a coastline along the Red Sea.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 & 3

Q34. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The Supreme Court of India has original jurisdiction in disputes between the Centre and States.

Statement 2: Original jurisdiction means the case can be filed directly in the Supreme Court without going to lower courts.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q35. Consider the following statements regarding the proposed development of Great Nicobar Island:

1. The project includes development of a transshipment port at Galathea Bay and an international airport as key components.
2. The entire project area is free from forest diversion and is primarily located on revenue land.
3. The plan includes creation of tourism, port-linked finance, and wellness hubs to drive economic growth.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q36. With reference to diversion of forest land for mining projects in India, which one of the following statements is correct?

- (a) Approval of the State Government is sufficient for diversion of forest land for mining purposes
- (b) Consent of Gram Sabha is required only in cases involving protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries
- (c) Forest clearance once granted cannot be subject to conditions related to local communities
- (d) Recognition of forest rights and consent of Gram Sabha are required prior to diversion of forest land under the Forest Rights Act

Q37. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Lebanon–Israel boundary features?

1. The Litani River flows close to the Israel border in southern Lebanon.
2. The Golan Heights lie within Lebanon.
3. The Blue Line demarcates the boundary between Lebanon and Israel.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 & 3

Q38. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: The Rajya Sabha represents the States of India.

Statement II: Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected members of State Legislative Assemblies.

Statement III: The election is conducted using proportional representation by single transferable vote.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q39. Consider the following pairs:

Country	Maritime Feature / Strategic Location
1. Iran	Controls northern coast of the Strait of Hormuz
2. Oman	Controls southern coast of the Strait of Hormuz
3. Turkey	Controls the Strait of Malacca
4. Denmark	Controls access to the GIUK Gap

How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q40. Consider the following statements regarding India's GDP and its determinants in the context of recent global developments:

1. Private consumption is the largest contributor to India's GDP, accounting for more than half of total output.
2. A rise in global crude oil prices can negatively impact India's GDP growth by increasing imports and reducing disposable income.
3. Net exports contribute positively to GDP only when imports exceed exports.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q41. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of U.S. Vice-President:

1. The Vice-President is the ex-officio President of the Senate.
2. The Vice-President has a casting vote in the Senate in case of a tie.
3. The Vice-President is directly elected by the people of the United States.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q42. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The Strait of Malacca is located between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Statement 2: It is a crucial route for steel and aluminium shipments from the Middle East to East Asia.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q43. Consider the following statements with reference to global food price dynamics:

1. A rise in crude oil prices can increase food prices through higher input costs such as fertilizers and transportation.
2. Diversion of crops like maize and sugarcane for biofuel production can contribute to food inflation.
3. High global food stocks always prevent any increase in food prices.
4. Financial speculation in agricultural commodities can amplify food price volatility.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q44. With reference to oak forests in the Indian Himalayan region, consider the following statements:

1. Oak forests contribute to groundwater recharge and help in maintaining watershed stability.
2. Chir pine invasion into oak forests reduces the incidence of forest fires due to its lower flammability.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q45. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of State Legislative Assembly elections?

1. State Legislative Assembly elections are conducted by the Election Commission of India.
2. The Governor conducts and supervises elections in the state.

3. Elections are held based on universal adult franchise.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 & 3

Q46. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The Prime Minister is the real executive head of India.

Statement 2: The President exercises all executive powers independently without advice.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
(b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
(c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
(d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q47. Consider the following statements regarding global drug regulatory systems:

1. Many developing countries rely on approvals by the US Food and Drug Administration for faster access to medicines.
2. Accelerated approval pathways completely eliminate the need for national regulatory scrutiny.
3. Changes in regulatory standards of major agencies can affect global clinical trial designs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 & 3

Q48. With reference to recent reforms in agricultural procurement systems in India, the introduction of biometric authentication at mandis is most closely associated with which of the following objectives?

- (a) Rationalising Minimum Support Price determination
(b) Strengthening end-to-end traceability and reducing fraudulent procurement
(c) Promoting contract farming arrangements between farmers and private players
(d) Facilitating interstate movement of agricultural produce through a unified market

Q49. With reference to wildlife conservation in India, consider the following statements:

1. Wildlife sanctuaries are declared under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
2. Human activities like grazing and resource collection are completely prohibited in wildlife sanctuaries.
3. National Parks provide a higher degree of protection than Wildlife Sanctuaries.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
(b) 1 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q50. With reference to sports awards in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award is given for the most outstanding performance by a sportsperson over a period of four years.

2. The Arjuna Award considers qualities such as leadership, sportsmanship, and discipline along with performance.
3. There is no upper limit on the number of Khel Ratna awards that can be given in a year.
4. Recommendations for national sports awards can be made by national sports federations and state governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 4 only
(c) 1, 2 and 4 only
(d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Q51. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: Census is a Union subject under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Statement 2: States have no role in the conduct of Census operations.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
(b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
(c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
(d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q52. The minimum voting age in India was reduced from 21 to 18 years by which amendment?

- (a) 42nd Amendment
(b) 44th Amendment
(c) 73rd Amendment
(d) 61st Amendment

Q53. Consider the following statements regarding the Anthropocene:

1. It refers to a proposed geological epoch marked by significant human impact on Earth's systems.
2. It has been formally accepted as an official geological epoch by the International Union of Geological Sciences.
3. Human-induced climate change and biodiversity loss are key markers of this epoch.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q54. Consider the following statements:

1. The process of delimitation in India is carried out by an independent statutory body whose orders have the force of law and cannot be challenged in any court.
2. The implementation of women's reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is contingent upon a fresh delimitation exercise after the Census.
3. The current freeze on inter-state allocation of Lok Sabha seats is based on the 1971 Census and is constitutionally mandated until 2026.
4. The Election Commission of India is the final authority responsible for both conducting delimitation and revising electoral boundaries.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
(b) 2, 3 and 4 only

- (c) 1 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q55. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: Thermal power plants generate electricity by burning fossil fuels to produce steam.

Statement II: Hydropower plants generate electricity using flowing water by burning fuel.

Statement III: Solar power plants generate electricity by converting sunlight into mechanical energy.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q56. Which of the following correctly explains the principle behind allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha?

- (a) Equal number of seats to each state
- (b) Proportional representation based on population with uniformity across states
- (c) Greater weightage to economically developed states
- (d) Allocation based on literacy and development indicators

Q57. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act?

- 1. It allows the designation of individuals as terrorists.
- 2. It was enacted in 1987 to combat terrorism.
- 3. It provides for extended detention without filing a charge sheet under certain conditions.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q58. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The National Rural Livelihoods Mission aims to reduce poverty by promoting self-employment and organization of rural poor into Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Statement 2: SHGs under NRLM primarily function as informal credit institutions facilitating savings and internal lending among members.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q59. With reference to the use of satellite technology in modern warfare and global geopolitics, consider the following statements:

- 1. Commercial satellites can be used for military surveillance and targeting purposes in contemporary conflicts.

- 2. The use of foreign satellite systems for military operations is explicitly prohibited under international space law.
- 3. Dual-use space technologies blur the distinction between civilian and military applications.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q60. Consider the following statements regarding the Indian Monsoon, climate variability, and forecasting:

- 1. The Indian summer monsoon accounts for more than 70% of India's annual rainfall and is crucial for agriculture and water resources.
- 2. El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean are generally associated with above-normal monsoon rainfall in India.
- 3. Improved seasonal forecasting by the India Meteorological Department has enhanced policy preparedness in areas like water management and agriculture.
- 4. India has become less vulnerable to monsoon variability primarily due to a significant reduction in dependence on rainfed agriculture.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q61. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to thunderstorms?

- 1. Thunderstorms are associated with cumulonimbus clouds.
- 2. They are always formed only during winter season.
- 3. Thunderstorms involve lightning and strong winds.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q62. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: The Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha presides over the House in the absence of the Chairman.

Statement II: The Deputy Chairman is elected by the members of the Rajya Sabha from among themselves.

Statement III: The Deputy Chairman is appointed by the President of India.

Which one of the following is correct with respect to the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q63. With reference to digital platforms and e-reading ecosystems in India, consider the following statements:

1. Users purchasing e-books on platforms like Amazon Kindle have full ownership rights similar to physical books.
2. Digital platforms can restrict access to purchased content if device support or service is discontinued.
3. Software like Calibre allows users to manage and store e-books independent of proprietary ecosystems.
4. Planned obsolescence in digital devices is regulated strictly under Indian consumer protection laws, preventing companies from discontinuing services arbitrarily.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q64. With reference to bank nationalisation in India, consider the following statements:

1. The major bank nationalisation in 1969 aimed to align banking with the objectives of a socialist economy and expand institutional credit to neglected sectors.
2. The Reserve Bank of India fully supported the decision of bank nationalisation and was actively consulted before its announcement.
3. Bank nationalisation significantly contributed to branch expansion in rural and semi-urban areas, promoting financial inclusion.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q65. Consider the following statements regarding public communication and electoral fairness in India:

1. The Election Commission of India can regulate government communication once the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into force.
2. The Common Cause vs Union of India (2015) case laid down guidelines to prevent misuse of public funds for political advertisements.
3. Digital communication platforms used by the government cannot be scrutinised under electoral norms if they are used for welfare awareness.
4. Use of taxpayer-funded communication infrastructure for political promotion can create an uneven electoral playing field.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q66. Consider the following statements regarding labour issues and workers' protests in India:

1. A large proportion of India's workforce is employed in the informal sector with limited social security protection.
2. Labour Codes in India primarily aim to strengthen collective bargaining mechanisms of trade unions.

3. Statutory minimum wages in India are uniformly enforced across all states without significant violations.
4. Weak implementation of labour rights and absence of effective grievance redressal mechanisms can contribute to industrial unrest.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Q67. Consider the following with reference to the physiographic divisions of West Bengal:

1. The northern part of West Bengal includes the Eastern Himalayas.
2. The Terai and Duars regions lie south of the Himalayas.
3. The Rarh region forms part of the coastal plains of West Bengal.

How many of the above is/are not correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q68. Which of the following is not a discretionary power of the Governor?

- (a) Sending a report recommending President's Rule
- (b) Reserving a bill for the President
- (c) Appointing the Council of Ministers
- (d) Choosing Chief Minister in case of hung assembly

Q69. Consider the following statements with reference to the Strait of Hormuz and recent geopolitical developments:

1. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and is a critical chokepoint for global oil trade.
2. The War Powers Act in the United States allows the President to deploy armed forces without any Congressional oversight.
3. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz can significantly impact global oil prices and inflation.
4. Iran lies to the north of the Strait of Hormuz, while Oman lies to its south.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q70. Consider the following statements:

1. Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code criminalises deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings.
2. Laws dealing with sacrilege and religious sentiments primarily fall under the State List in the Constitution of India.
3. Absence of safeguards against false complaints in religious offence laws may lead to misuse and social tensions.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q71. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: The Chief Minister plays a key role in policy formulation at the State level.

Statement II: The Chief Minister cannot be a member of the Legislative Council.

Statement III: The Council of Ministers is not bound by the principle of collective responsibility.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q72. The provision related to the removal of Election Commission members is mentioned in:

- Article 324
- Article 326
- Article 356
- Article 368

Q73. With reference to developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Tech companies, consider the following statements:

- Differential Privacy:** Companies adopting this approach use mathematical techniques to ensure that AI models are trained on aggregated patterns without compromising the identity of individual users.
- Edge AI Integration:** The integration of AI into hardware devices such as smart glasses and wearables represents a shift from centralized cloud-based processing to decentralized on-device AI processing.
- Strategic Partnerships:** Early-stage investments and partnerships with specialized startups have been a primary driver for Big Tech firms to integrate generative AI tools into their existing software ecosystems.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2, and 3

Q74. With reference to tiger conservation in India, consider the following statements:

- Core areas of tiger reserves are legally designated as inviolate spaces where human activities are not permitted.
- Buffer zones are meant to promote coexistence by allowing certain regulated human activities.
- Compensation for human and livestock loss is not part of India's tiger conservation strategy.
- Community participation in eco-tourism is increasingly being used as a tool for conservation.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 1, 2 and 4 only
- 2, 3 and 4 only
- 1, 3 and 4 only

Q75. Consider the following with reference to (GOBAR-DHAN) Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources:

- The scheme aims to convert cattle dung and organic waste into biogas, bio-CNG, and manure.
- It is implemented under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
- The scheme is only applicable to urban areas for waste management.

How many of the above is/are correct?

- Only one
- Only two
- All three
- None

Q76. Which of the following is a key benefit of Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT):

- Increase in greenhouse gas emissions
- Promotion of fossil fuel dependency
- Reduction in agricultural productivity
- Waste-to-wealth generation

Q77. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of tribunals?

- Tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies established to adjudicate specialised disputes.
- The provisions related to tribunals were added by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
- Tribunals are mentioned under Articles 323A and 323B of the Constitution.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Q78. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The National Security Act (NSA), 1980 allows preventive detention of individuals to maintain public order and national security.

Statement 2: Under the NSA, a person can be detained without formal charges for up to 48 months.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q79. Consider the following statements regarding modernisation initiatives in Indian Railways:

- Modernisation of Indian Railways includes the introduction of advanced signalling systems such as automatic train protection to enhance safety.
- Dedicated Freight Corridors are aimed at improving passenger train speed by prioritising passenger movement over freight.
- Electrification of railway tracks contributes to both energy efficiency and reduction in carbon emissions.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- Only one
- Only two
- All three
- None

Q80. With reference to India's fertiliser sector in the context of global supply disruptions, consider the following statements:

1. India is fully self-sufficient in urea production and does not depend on imports.
2. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries account for a significant share of India's fertiliser and LNG imports.
3. Biostimulants directly provide essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to crops.
4. Fertiliser price shocks can affect agricultural output by disrupting input availability during key cropping seasons.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 2 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Q81. Consider the following statements regarding pay reforms and performance measurement in India:

1. The Performance Related Incentive Scheme (PRIS) was first introduced by the Sixth Central Pay Commission.
2. The Results Framework Document (RFD) aimed to link government performance directly with measurable outcomes across administrative levels.
3. The Seventh Pay Commission successfully institutionalised performance-linked pay across all government departments.
4. Performance-linked pay in government is easier to implement than in the private sector due to clearly defined objectives.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q82. With reference to recent developments in the global technology ecosystem, particularly the shift from hardware-centric innovation to AI-driven platforms, consider the following statements:

1. The growing importance of Artificial Intelligence indicates a shift from device-based innovation to context-aware and predictive computing systems.
2. Strong network effects in digital ecosystems necessarily ensure continued cultural and technological leadership of a company.
3. Emerging consumer preferences, especially among younger users, favour modular and interoperable technology ecosystems over closed systems.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q83. Consider the following with reference to Manipur:

1. The Imphal Valley is surrounded by hills on all sides.
2. The Barak River originates in Manipur and flows westward into Assam.
3. Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India.

How many of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q84. The Gujral Doctrine is related to:

- (a) Economic liberalization
- (b) Nuclear policy
- (c) Agricultural reforms
- (d) Foreign policy towards neighbours

Q85. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to the Constitution of India?

1. It establishes India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic.
2. It provides for a rigid constitution with no flexibility.
3. It ensures Fundamental Rights to citizens.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q86. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: The World Bank provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries for development projects.

Statement II: The World Bank only provides military and defence funding to its member countries.

Statement III: The World Bank operates independently without any relation to member country contributions.

Which one of the following is correct with respect to the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct and both of them explain Statement I
- (b) Both Statement II and Statement III are correct but only one of them explains Statement I
- (c) Only one of the Statements II and III is correct and that explains Statement I
- (d) Neither Statement II nor Statement III is correct

Q87. With reference to the Khayal tradition in Hindustani classical music, consider the following statements:

1. The Khayal originated during the medieval period and is considered more rigid than Dhrupad in terms of improvisation.
2. The Gwalior Gharana is regarded as the oldest and foundational school of Khayal singing.
3. Khayal performances typically emphasize a balance of melody (raag), rhythm (taal), and lyrical expression.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Q88. With reference to India's energy transition and diversification strategy, which one of the following is the most appropriate rationale for promoting biomethane and small-scale LNG (SSLNG) simultaneously?

- (a) To completely eliminate the need for electricity in industrial and transport sectors
- (b) To decentralize energy distribution while reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels

- (c) To replace nuclear energy as the primary base-load power source
- (d) To ensure uniform pricing of natural gas across all global markets

Q89. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Chabahar Port?

1. It provides India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.
2. It is located on the Persian Gulf.
3. It is being developed with significant involvement of India.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q90. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: South Africa was part of the original BRIC grouping and joined later to make it BRICS.

Statement 2: The term “BRIC” was originally coined by an economist to describe emerging economies.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q91. With reference to Payments Banks in India and the recent regulatory action on Payments Bank by the Reserve Bank of India, consider the following statements:

1. Payments Banks are permitted to accept demand deposits but are not allowed to undertake lending activities.
2. Deposits held in Payments Banks are covered under deposit insurance up to ₹5 lakh per depositor.
3. Payments Banks can provide UPI and fund transfer services even after restrictions imposed by RBI.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q92. With reference to extreme rainfall events in India, consider the following statements:

1. A below-normal monsoon rainfall forecast implies a lower probability of flood events across India.
2. The frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events in India have increased in recent decades, partly due to climate change.
3. The India Meteorological Department classifies “extremely heavy rainfall” as rainfall above 204.5 mm in 24 hours (post-2016 revision).
4. Urban flooding in India is solely a result of extreme rainfall events and not linked to human factors.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q93. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of Central Armed Police Forces:

1. They function under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. They are primarily responsible for external defence of India’s borders like the Army.
3. They include forces such as CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, and SSB.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q94. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: Defections by elected legislators are regulated under the Anti-Defection Law to maintain political stability.

Statement 2: The law disqualifies members if they voluntarily give up party membership or defy the party whip.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
- (b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
- (c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
- (d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q95. With reference to the global Printed Circuit Board (PCB) industry and related supply chains, consider the following statements:

1. Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs) are essential components used only in consumer electronics and not in advanced computing systems like AI servers.
2. Polyphenylene Ether (PPE) resin is a critical input material used in PCB laminates.
3. Disruptions in petrochemical industries can affect electronics manufacturing supply chains.
4. Increasing demand for AI-based infrastructure can influence the prices of electronic components like PCBs.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Q96. Consider the following statements:

1. The increasing dependence of Indian agriculture on fossil fuel-based inputs makes it vulnerable to global supply shocks.
2. The Green Revolution in India primarily reduced the dependence on chemical fertilisers and fossil fuel-based inputs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q97. Which of the following statements are correct in respect of the Gulf of Oman?

1. It borders Pakistan along its northern coastline.
2. It is part of the Indian Ocean region.

3. It lies entirely within the territory of Iran.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q98. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: Multi-phase elections cannot ever reduce the influence of money and muscle power.

Statement 2: The Election Commission of India may schedule elections in phases depending on logistical requirements.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
(b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
(c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
(d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q99. With reference to student mental health and learning environments in India, consider the following statements:

1. The “Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect” suggests that a student’s academic self-concept may decline in highly competitive environments despite similar ability levels.
2. The “Arrival Fallacy” implies that achieving major life goals guarantees long-term psychological well-being.
3. Government initiatives like Tele-MANAS aim to improve accessibility of mental health services for students across India.
4. A demand-driven mental health approach focuses on equipping individuals with emotional skills and awareness to seek help proactively.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 3 and 4 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q100. With reference to electricity grid management and power demand in India, consider the following statements:

1. Solar power contributes significantly to meeting peak electricity demand during night hours in India.
2. Forced outages in thermal power plants can aggravate supply shortages during peak demand periods.
3. Spot electricity prices in power exchanges tend to increase when demand exceeds supply, especially during non-solar hours.
4. India’s peak electricity demand always occurs during daytime due to industrial consumption.

How many of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

Q101. With reference to global oil governance and India’s energy security, consider the following statements:

1. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) uses production quotas as a tool to influence global oil prices.

2. The International Energy Agency (IEA) was established in the 1970s in response to oil supply shocks to coordinate energy policies among major consuming countries.
3. India is a full member of the IEA and participates in decision-making regarding coordinated Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) releases.
4. OPEC+ includes non-OPEC countries such as Russia that cooperate on production targets.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1 and 4 only

Q102. With reference to Buddhist relic traditions and their historical evolution in India, consider the following statements:

1. After the mahaparinirvana of Gautama Buddha, his relics were initially divided among eight claimants and enshrined in stupas, later to be redistributed by Emperor Ashoka.
2. The Piprahwa Stupa excavations provided archaeological evidence through Brahmi inscriptions that linked the enshrined relics to the Sakya clan.
3. The tradition of relic veneration (Saririka) was a primary driver for the expansion of Buddhist architecture, including the development of pilgrimage circuits across Asia.
4. Ladakh served as a significant corridor for the transmission of Buddhist relic traditions toward Central Asia, evidenced by ancient rock carvings and monastic stupas.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

Q103. Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is a statutory body established under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

Statement 2: NHRC is responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights in India.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 explains statement 1
(b) Both statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and statement 2 does not explain statement 1
(c) Statement 1 is correct, but Statement 2 is incorrect
(d) Statement 2 is correct, but Statement 1 is incorrect

Q104. Consider the following with reference to Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO):

1. The EPFO is a constitutional body established under the Constitution of India.
2. EPFO functions under the Ministry of Finance.
3. EPFO manages only pension schemes and does not deal with provident fund contributions.

How many of the above is/are correct?

- (a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

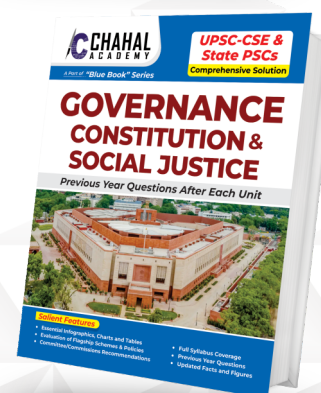
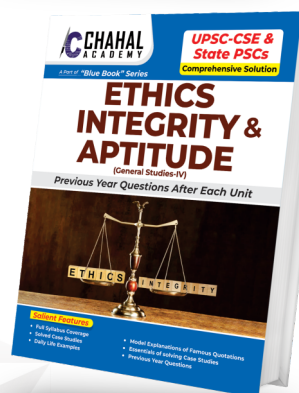
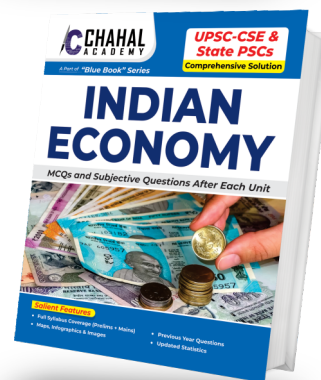
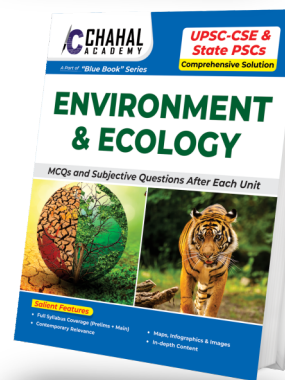
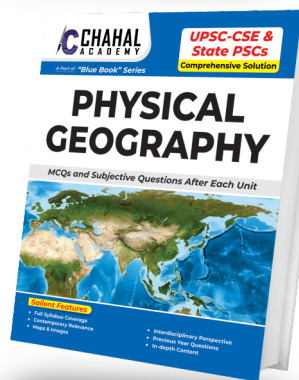
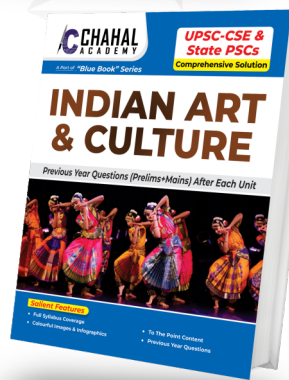
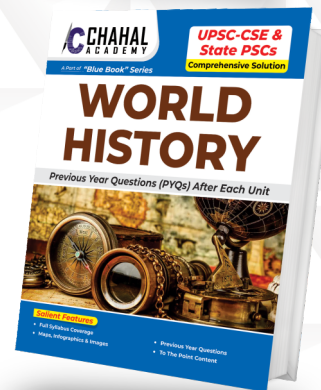
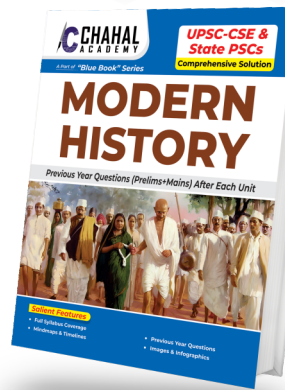
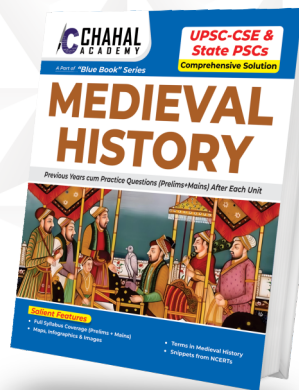
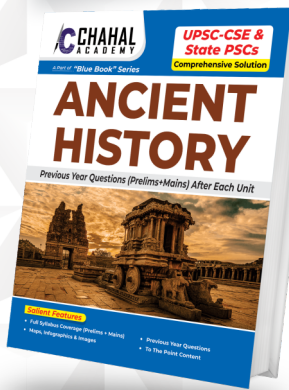
Answer Key: April 2026

Q1.	c	Q2.	a	Q3.	a	Q4.	a	Q5.	a
Q6.	b (2 and 3 only)	Q7.	d	Q8.	c	Q9.	c	Q10.	a
Q11.	b (2 and 3 only)	Q12.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q13.	c	Q14.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q15.	b
Q16.	a	Q17.	b	Q18.	a	Q19.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q20.	c
Q21.	a	Q22.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q23.	a	Q24.	b	Q25.	a
Q26.	c	Q27.	c	Q28.	b	Q29.	c	Q30.	b (1 and 2 only)
Q31.	c	Q32.	a (3 only)	Q33.	a	Q34.	a	Q35.	b (1 and 3 only)
Q36.	d	Q37.	c	Q38.	a	Q39.	b (1 and 2 only)	Q40.	b (1 and 2 only)
Q41.	a	Q42.	c	Q43.	c (1,2 and 4 only)	Q44.	a	Q45.	c
Q46.	c	Q47.	b	Q48.	b	Q49.	a	Q50.	c
Q51.	c	Q52.	d	Q53.	c	Q54.	a	Q55.	d
Q56.	b	Q57.	c	Q58.	a	Q59.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q60.	b (1 and 3 only)
Q61.	c	Q62.	c	Q63.	b (1 and 4 only)	Q64.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q65.	c (1, 2 and 4 only)
Q66.	a	Q67.	a (3 only)	Q68.	c	Q69.	a	Q70.	c
Q71.	d	Q72.	a	Q73.	d	Q74.	b	Q75.	b (1 and 2 only)
Q76.	d	Q77.	d	Q78.	c	Q79.	(b) Only two	Q80.	a
Q81.	b (1 and 2 only)	Q82.	b (1 and 3 only)	Q83.	c	Q84.	d	Q85.	c
Q86.	d	Q87.	a (1 only)	Q88.	b	Q89.	c	Q90.	d
Q91.	a	Q92.	b	Q93.	c	Q94.	a	Q95.	a (1 only)
Q96.	a	Q97.	a	Q98.	d	Q99.	b	Q100.	b (1 and 4 only)
Q101.	c	Q102.	d	Q103.	a	Q104.	d		

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