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AUGUST 2026

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MAINS

**UPSC CSE
IAS Exam**

2027

Monthly Magazine



**Most Important
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**Topics Based on
Syllabus and
Previous Year
Questions**



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PREFACE

Dear Students,

Understanding and organizing Civil Services Exam relevant Current affairs in a crisp and concise manner is essential for success in the Civil Services exam. Our exclusive CSE Mains current affairs magazine will fulfil that need in your preparation.

Features

- Crisp, Clear and insightful analysis on key Current Affairs issues.
- Important issues segregated according to CSE Main Exam syllabus.
- Content written in question and answer format for clarity, easy recollection and coherence while writing the main examination.
- Exam relevant topics curated from The Hindu and Indian Express.

All the best

R.C.Reddy IAS Study Circle

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GS I - INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE, HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD AND SOCIETY

A. MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

I. Significant events, personalities, issues

1. COMMUNAL AWARD, POONA PACT & GANDHI-AMBEDKAR DEBATE

Why in News?

- The **Communal Award (1932)** and the subsequent **Poona Pact (1932)** marked a turning point in the political representation of the Depressed Classes, later Scheduled Castes.

Background

- **Colonial Policy:** Separate electorates first introduced for Muslims under the Indian Councils Act, 1909, later extended to other communities.
- **Depressed Classes Demand:** Political representation for Depressed Classes became a major issue during the Round Table Conferences (1930-32).
- **Ambedkar's Stand:** Advocated separate electorates as essential political safeguards, ensuring independent leadership and autonomy for Depressed Classes.
- **Gandhi's View:** Opposed separate electorates, emphasising social integration, unity of Hindu society, and reform from within rather than political separation.

Communal Award, 1932

- Announced by **PM Ramsay MacDonald** on 16 August 1932.
- Recognised Depressed Classes as a **separate minority** for electoral purposes.
- Granted **71 reserved seats** in provincial legislatures with separate electorates.
- Extended separate electorates to Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans.

Ambedkar's Position

- Wanted **separate electorates** for Depressed Classes to elect their own representatives.
- Feared joint electorates would make leaders dependent on caste Hindus.
- Saw **political autonomy** as essential for social emancipation.

Gandhi's Opposition

- Considered Depressed Classes part of Hindu society, not a separate community.
- Believed separate electorates would **fragment society** and weaken national unity.
- Saw untouchability as a **moral evil** to be eradicated by caste Hindus.
- Advocated **social reform and integration**, not political separation.

Poona Pact, 1932

- Gandhi began a **fast unto death** on 20 September 1932 against separate electorates.
- Ambedkar initially resisted but compromise was reached on 24 September 1932.

- **Key Provisions:**

- Separate electorates abandoned.
- **Reserved seats increased** from 71 to 148 in provincial legislatures.
- 18% representation in Central Legislature.
- Joint electorates with reserved seats ensured Depressed Classes' presence.
- Accepted by British government as amendment to Communal Award.

Significance

- Established **reserved seats model** within joint electorates - precursor to constitutional reservations.
- Recognised **political representation** as vital for social equality.
- Highlighted **Gandhi-Ambedkar ideological divergence**: moral reform vs. institutional safeguards.
- Ambedkar's compromise secured **enhanced representation** despite losing separate electorates.
- Legacy: Reservation of seats for SCs/STs in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies continues today.

Conclusion

The **Communal Award and Poona Pact** reflected the clash between **social integration (Gandhi)** and **political autonomy (Ambedkar)**. The compromise ensured India's constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

II. The Freedom Struggle

1. WORLD WAR I & INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Why in News?

- On **4 August 1914**, Britain's entry into the First World War automatically drew colonial India into the conflict, shaping both its military role and nationalist politics.

India's Contributions in WWI

- **Troop Strength:** Nearly 1.3-1.5 million Indian volunteers served across Europe, Mesopotamia, East Africa, and the Middle East.
- **Casualties:** Over 60,000 soldiers died, with thousands wounded or missing.
- **Key Fronts:** Indian troops fought at Ypres on the Western Front and dominated the Mesopotamian campaign.
- **Gallantry:** Earned numerous decorations, including Victoria Crosses.
- **Supplies & Animals:** Sent 3.7 million tonnes of materials and 170,000 animals for transport.
- **Financial Aid:** Provided loans and cash worth hundreds of millions of pounds, equivalent to billions today.

Indian Demands

- **Expectations:** Sacrifices raised hopes for constitutional reforms and self-government.
- **INC Resolution:** At Lucknow (1916), INC demanded Britain declare self-rule as its objective.
- **Leaders' Views:** Figures like Madan Mohan Malaviya argued the war accelerated India's constitutional progress.

British Announcements

- **Montagu Declaration (1917):** Promised gradual development of self-governing institutions.
- **Government of India Act, 1919:** Introduced bicameral legislature and provincial dyarchy.

Shortcomings of Reforms

- **Concentration of Power:** Governors retained overriding authority over finance, police, and law.

- **Discrimination:** Indian soldiers faced limited promotion opportunities; war memorials often omitted their names.
- **Perception:** Britain valued Indian sacrifices but denied equal recognition.

Post-War Repression

- **Rowlatt Act (1919):** Extended wartime emergency powers, enabling detention without trial and censorship.
- **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919):** Peaceful protesters in Amritsar were fired upon, destroying trust in British reforms.
- **Impact:** Convinced many Indians that cooperation with colonial rulers would not secure justice.

Impact on National Movement

- **Shift in Strategy:** Moderates lost faith in gradual reforms; Gandhi's mass politics gained momentum.
- **Unity:** Wartime sacrifices, repression, and violence united diverse social groups.
- **New Movements:** Laid foundation for Non-Cooperation (1920-22), Civil Disobedience (1930-34), and Quit India (1942).

Conclusion

World War I reshaped India's independence struggle. Immense sacrifices raised hopes of self-rule, but Britain's limited reforms and repressive acts like Rowlatt and Jallianwala Bagh spurred mass nationalist movements.

B. INDIAN SOCIETY

I. Role of Women and Women's Organization, Population and Associated Issues, Poverty and Developmental issues, Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

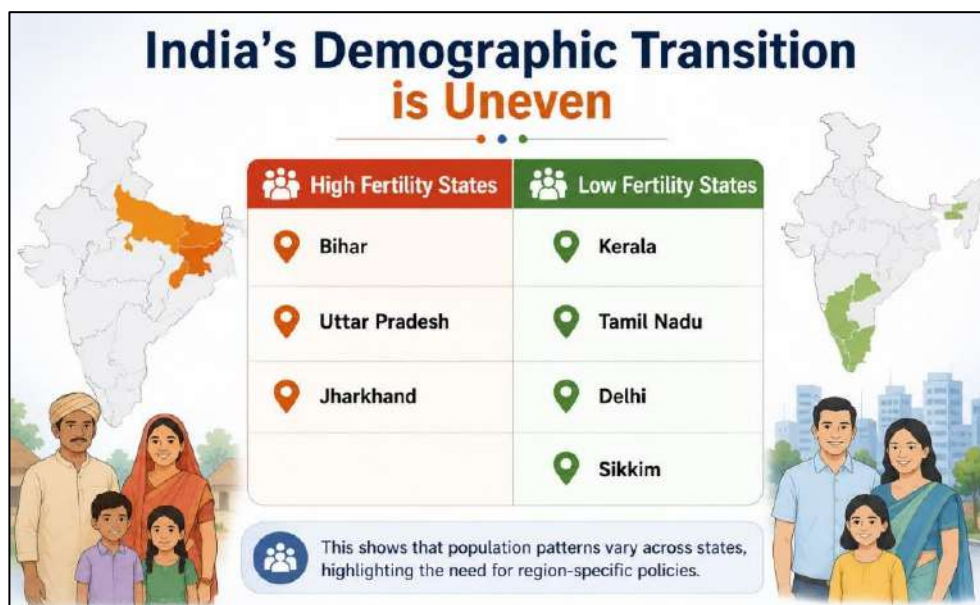
1. YOUTH CHOICES AND INDIA'S CHANGING FAMILY DYNAMICS

Why in News?

- The **UNFPA Demographic Futures Survey 2025** shows that Indian youth still aspire for marriage and parenthood.

Delayed Family Formation

- **Economic Insecurity:** Rising living costs, job instability, housing expenses, and childcare burdens make financial independence a prerequisite before marriage or childbirth.
- **Educational & Career Aspirations:** Expanded access to higher education, especially for women, has shifted priorities toward careers and financial autonomy, postponing family responsibilities.
- **Gender Inequality in Caregiving:** Unequal household responsibilities force women to choose between careers and motherhood, reducing workforce participation and family size.
- **Urbanisation Pressures:** High housing costs, limited space, and migration away from traditional support systems delay childbearing among nuclear families.
- **Climate Anxiety & Future Uncertainty:** Concerns about climate change, conflicts, and disasters influence reproductive decisions, with many youth hesitant to start families.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Stress from academics, employment, finances, and social media leads youth to prioritise emotional stability before parenting.



Positive Aspects of Demographic Transition

- **Improved Female Education:** Women delay marriage, join the workforce, and make informed reproductive choices.
- **Better Maternal Healthcare:** Institutional deliveries, family planning, and contraceptive access have expanded under the National Health Mission.
- **Decline in Child Marriage:** Fewer girls marry before 18, improving health, education, and economic participation.
- **Reproductive Autonomy:** Couples increasingly decide marriage timing, family size, and birth spacing, reflecting a rights-based approach.

Challenges

- **Regional Disparities:** Fertility and demographic trends vary widely across states, requiring tailored policies.
- **Low Female Labour Force Participation:** Lack of childcare, workplace discrimination, and caregiving burdens hinder women's economic role.
- **Risk of Premature Ageing:** Persistently low fertility may shrink the workforce, raise dependency ratios, and strain pensions and healthcare.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen Youth Employment:** Create quality jobs, expand skill development, and support entrepreneurship.
- **Expand Affordable Childcare:** Establish crèches, community centres, and workplace childcare facilities.
- **Promote Shared Caregiving:** Encourage paternity leave and equitable household responsibilities.
- **Family-Friendly Workplaces:** Flexible hours, hybrid work, and paid parental leave to balance careers and families.

Conclusion

India's youth are reshaping family choices delaying marriage and parenthood due to economic, social, and psychological pressures, demanding proactive state-specific policies to sustain India's demographic dividend.

C. GEOGRAPHY

I. Salient features of World's Physical Geography.

1. COASTAL EROSION IN INDIA

Why in News?

- The Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways informed the Rajya Sabha that **about Odisha's coastline erosion**, highlighting the urgency of coastal protection.

What is Coastal Erosion?

- Defined as the **wearing away of land and removal of beaches, dunes, or cliffs** along coastlines.
- Driven by **waves, tides, currents, and wind**, which transport soil and rock faster than natural replenishment.

Causes & Mechanisms

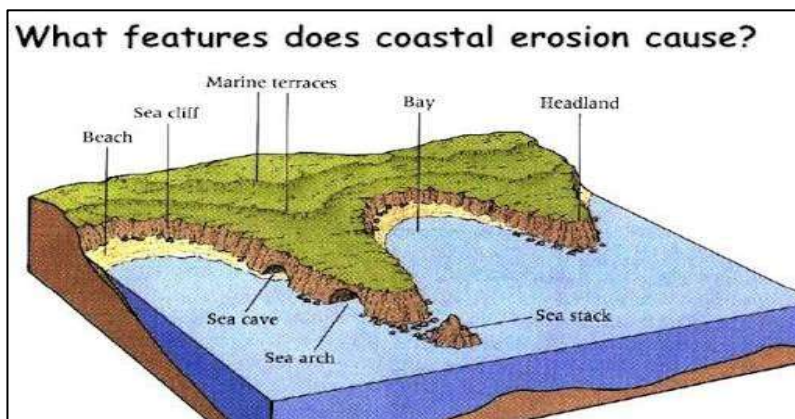
- Wave Action & Storms:** Strong waves and cyclones accelerate shoreline retreat.
- Sea-Level Rise:** Expands wave reach, eroding higher stretches.
- Loss of Mangroves:** Removal of natural buffers exposes coasts.
- Human Activities:** Ports, sand mining, and seawalls disrupt sediment flow.
- Mechanisms:** Hydraulic action, abrasion, attrition, and solution gradually weaken coastal rocks.

Status in India

- 33.6% of India's 7,516-km coastline** is vulnerable.
- Most affected states:**
 - West Bengal** - 60.5% coast eroding.
 - Kerala** - 46.4% shoreline retreat.
 - Tamil Nadu** - 42.7% coastline loss.
 - Gujarat** - 537 km eroding shoreline.
 - Odisha** - 28% coastline affected.

Impacts

- Loss of land, agriculture, and habitats and damage to infrastructure (roads, ports, houses).
- Displacement of coastal communities. Livelihood loss in fishing, farming, tourism.
- Saltwater intrusion into groundwater and soils. Degradation of ecosystems (mangroves, wetlands, coral reefs).
- Increased vulnerability to cyclones and floods. Economic costs of protection and resettlement.



Measures Taken

- **Monitoring:** NCCR uses satellite imagery, GIS, and field surveys.
- **Regulation:** Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019 restricts development.
- **Shoreline Management Plans:** State-specific scientific strategies.
- **Structural & Nature-Based Solutions:** Seawalls, groynes, artificial reefs, dune rehabilitation, mangrove restoration.
- **Funding:** National Disaster Management Fund (NDMF) supports erosion mitigation and resettlement.

Odisha Case Study

About **28.3% of Odisha's coastline is eroding**, while 54.1% is accreting and 17.6% remains stable.

- **Affected Districts:** Jagatsinghpur, Ganjam and Kendrapara are among the most vulnerable coastal districts.
- **Major Hotspots:** Gopalpur, Penth-Satbhaya, Gahirmatha, Chilika mouth and Devi River mouth face severe erosion.
- **Impact:** Several villages in **Kendrapara** have been submerged, while communities in **Ganjam** have been displaced due to shoreline retreat.
- **Measures Taken:** The government has developed **climate resettlement colonies**, installed **geotextile tube embankments**, and constructed **sea wall-cum-service roads** to protect vulnerable coastal settlements.

Way Forward

- **Science-Based Planning:** Continuous satellite monitoring and GIS mapping.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Mangroves, dunes, wetlands, and beach nourishment.
- **Climate-Resilient Communities:** Early warning systems, resilient housing, livelihood protection, planned relocation.
- **Integrated Coastal Management:** Stronger coordination among Centre, States, communities, and scientific institutions.

Conclusion

Coastal erosion is a **multi-dimensional hazard** threatening India's environment, economy, and society. With one-third of the coastline vulnerable, **Odisha's case exemplifies the urgency of integrated, science-based, and community-centric coastal management.**

II. Key Natural Resources

1. WATER MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION IN INDIA

Why in news?

- The **Ministry of Jal Shakti** has highlighted nationwide water management initiatives, including the successful pilot of the **Atal Bhujal Yojana** across 8,203 water-stressed Gram Panchayats.

Water Management

- **Water Management** refers to the **strategic planning, distribution, and preservation** of surface and groundwater resources.
- While water is a **State subject**, the Centre supports states with **financial, technical, and digital infrastructure** for demand-side management, aquifer mapping, and rainwater harvesting.

Milestones in Water Conservation

- **Water Body Census:** 24.2 lakh water bodies geo-tagged nationwide.
- **Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB):** 1.55 crore recharge/storage structures created.

- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** Implemented in 8,203 Gram Panchayats across 7 states.
- **Catch the Rain Campaign:** 2 crore conservation and recharge works completed by July 2026.

Methods of Water Conservation

- **Participatory Demand-Side Management:** Gram Panchayats prepare water budgets; farmers adopt micro-irrigation.
- **3D GIS Aquifer Mapping:** NAQUIM 2.0 mapped 25 lakh sq. km to identify recharge zones.
- **Digital Telemetry Monitoring:** 24,000 DWLRs track groundwater levels in real time.
- **Hydrological Forecasting:** Satellite mapping and apps like Flood Watch India monitor reservoirs and flood stations.

Government Initiatives

- **NAQUIM 1.0 & 2.0:** District-level aquifer maps and management plans are prepared and shared for sustainable groundwater use.
- **IN-GRES:** A web-based system used for groundwater resource estimation, assessment and better planning.
- **WIMS:** A centralized platform for storing and managing hydrological data under the **National Hydrology Project**.
- **PMKSY Digital Asset Mapping:** Irrigation assets under **HKKP and RRR schemes** are geo-tagged for effective monitoring and management.

Challenges

- **Jurisdictional Friction:** Water as a State subject leads to uneven governance and disputes.
- **Over-Extraction:** Subsidized irrigation encourages unsustainable groundwater use.
- **Maintenance Issues:** Recharge structures often silt up without community upkeep.
- **Data Disconnect:** Advanced mapping data not translated into actionable village-level water budgets.

Way Ahead

- **Community-Led Governance:** Scale Atal Bhujal Yojana lessons nationwide.
- **Mandatory Rainwater Harvesting:** Enforce rooftop harvesting in urban and rural areas.
- **Micro-Irrigation & Crop Switching:** Incentivize drip and sprinkler systems under PMKSY.
- **Integrated Dashboards:** Unify IN-GRES, WIMS, and JSJB data for real-time decision support.

Conclusion

India's water security requires a shift from **scheme-based conservation to outcome-based water governance**. Strengthening Centre-State coordination and linking technology with grassroots implementation will be crucial for building long-term water resilience.

2. TACKLING NON-REVENUE WATER FOR A WATER-SECURE VIKSIT BHARAT

Why in news?

- India's vision of **Viksit Bharat** has brought **urban water governance** into focus, as cities face rising water stress due to **groundwater over-extraction, rapid urbanisation and climate change**.

What is Non-Revenue Water (NRW)?

- Treated water that enters the distribution system but is lost before reaching consumers or being billed.
- **Types of Losses:**

- **Physical losses:** Leakages from old pipelines, broken valves, overflowing reservoirs.
- **Commercial losses:** Theft, inaccurate metering, unbilled public consumption.
- **Global Benchmark:** Advanced cities keep NRW below 10%, while in India it often exceeds 40-50%.

Current Level of Water Scarcity in Indian Cities

- **21 major cities** including Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai are at risk of running out of groundwater, according to NITI Aayog and Jal Shakti Ministry assessments.
- **Reservoir storage** across 166 major reservoirs has dropped below 40% capacity in several states, worsening urban supply.
- **Non-Revenue Water (NRW)** losses in cities like Delhi stand at nearly 58%, meaning more than half of treated water never reaches consumers.
- **Bengaluru:** Once home to 260+ lakes, now reduced to ~80; thousands of borewells have dried up, forcing reliance on Cauvery water transported 100 km away.
- **Delhi:** Over half of supplied water lost as NRW; Yamuna river heavily polluted, forcing dependence on tankers in many areas.

Challenges in Urban Water Governance

- **Financial Unsustainability:** Urban Local Bodies recover less than half of O&M costs due to NRW.
- **Dependence on Distant Sources:** Reliance on far-away rivers and aquifers increases energy costs and disputes.
- **Linear Use Model:** Only ~28% of wastewater treated; circular economy potential remains untapped.
- **Technology Deficit:** Lack of GIS mapping, SCADA systems, and District Metered Areas (DMAs) prevents proactive management.

Government Initiatives

- **AMRUT 2.0:** Focuses on **universal urban water supply, sewerage and reuse of treated wastewater** for sustainable cities.
- **Smart Cities Mission:** Promotes **smart meters, sensors and digital water management systems** to reduce losses and improve efficiency.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban):** Aims to provide **reliable tap water connections** and improve water security in urban households.
- **Composite Water Management Index:** Assesses and **ranks States/UTs on water management performance**, encouraging better governance and reforms.
- **Jal Shakti Abhiyan:** Promotes **rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and water conservation** through the *Catch the Rain* campaign.

Way forward

- **Sponge City Planning:** Integrate wetlands, permeable pavements, bioswales for recharge and flood control.
- **Dual Water Systems:** Separate potable and non-potable pipelines; enforce Zero Liquid Discharge for industries.
- **Groundwater Pricing:** Volumetric charges on private borewells to curb depletion.
- **Smart Monitoring:** GIS + SCADA for predictive leak detection and real-time pressure management.
- **Ring-Fenced NRW Budgets:** Use DMAs to track and reduce losses; tie funds to measurable outcomes.
- **Sewer Audits:** Prevent sewage leaks that contaminate groundwater and cause health crises.

Conclusion

India cannot achieve **Viksit Bharat** with leaking pipelines and fragmented governance. Tackling Non-Revenue Water through smart technology, equitable access, and integrated planning is essential for building **climate-resilient and water-secure cities**.



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5-DAYS FREE SPECIAL SESSIONS

DAY 1
08
SEPTEMBER
Essay
Time:- 4:00PM
to 6:00PM

DAY 2
09
SEPTEMBER
GS-II
Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 3
10
SEPTEMBER
GS-I
Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 4
11
SEPTEMBER
GS-III
Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 5
12
SEPTEMBER
GS-IV
Time:- 4:00PM
to 6:00PM

Mode:- Offline

**Location:-
Himayatnagar**

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IAS STUDY CIRCLE**

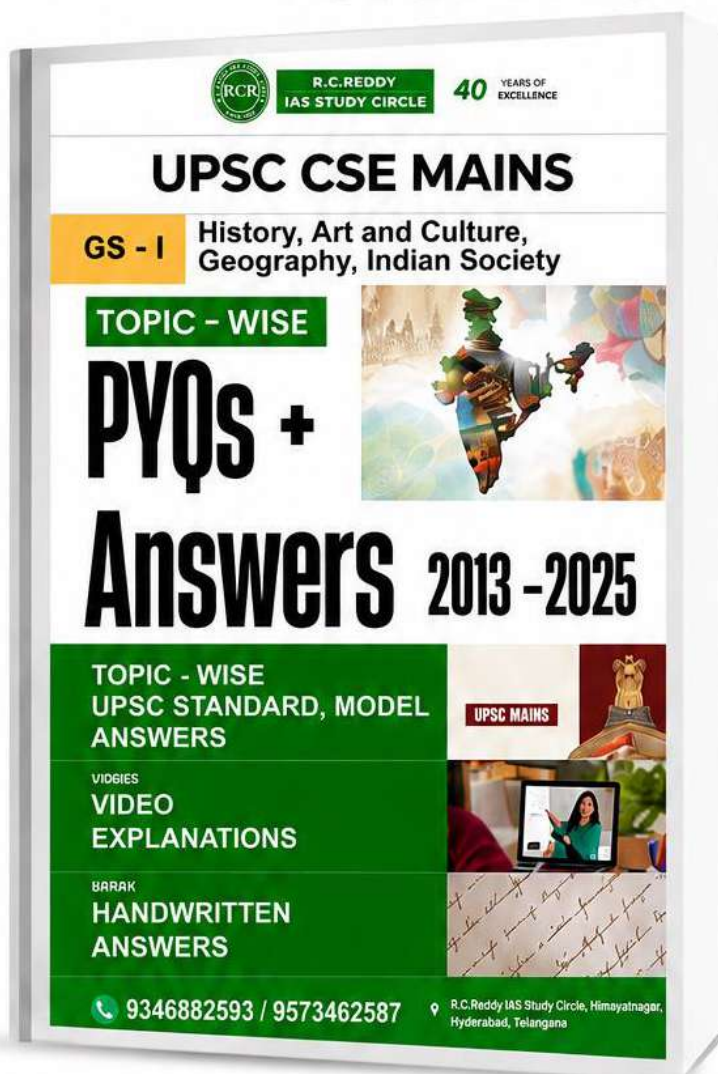
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GS - I

UPSC CSE MAINS

History, Art and Culture,
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SCAN TO ORDER



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GS 2 - GOVERNANCE, CONSTITUTION, POLITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A. POLITY

I. Comparison with other Constitutions

1. Voting System in India and USA

Why in News?

- U.S. President Donald Trump has renewed calls for stricter voter identification and citizenship verification through the proposed Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act.

U.S. Electoral System

- Federal Structure:** Under Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution, State legislatures primarily regulate the time, place and manner of federal elections, subject to Congressional powers.
- Decentralised Administration:** Unlike India, the U.S. lacks a single national election authority supervising voter registration, polling and counting; these functions are largely handled by State and local authorities.
- Federal Election Commission:** The Federal Election Commission primarily regulates campaign finance and does not function as an equivalent of India's Election Commission.
- Voter Registration:** Registration is generally elector-initiated in the U.S., with citizens affirming their eligibility, whereas India's electoral rolls are prepared under the overall superintendence of the Election Commission of India.
- Voter Identification:** Thirty-six U.S. States require some form of identification at polling stations, while 23 require photo identification. India issues Electoral Photo Identity Cards, although several alternative documents may also be accepted.
- Mail Voting:** Mail voting is substantially more significant in the U.S. than in India, where only a small proportion of electors used postal ballots in the cited general election.

India-U.S. Comparison

- Centralised Election Administration:** India follows a comparatively centralised model under the Election Commission of India, while the U.S. follows a highly decentralised State and local administration model.
- Preparation of Electoral Rolls:** In India, election authorities have traditionally played a proactive role in preparing and revising electoral rolls, whereas U.S. voters generally bear greater responsibility for registration.
- Identity Verification:** India provides Electoral Photo Identity Cards and permits specified alternative identification documents, while U.S. identification requirements vary significantly across States.
- Constitutional Context:** India's electoral administration reflects stronger Union-level institutional coordination, whereas American electoral federalism gives States substantial autonomy over election administration.

Special Intensive Revision in India

- Purpose:** The Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision seeks to verify voter eligibility and remove ineligible or duplicate entries from electoral rolls.
- Shift in Responsibility:** The process increases the responsibility of individual electors to provide information and establish eligibility, representing a significant shift from earlier enumeration-based approaches.
- Inclusion-Exclusion Challenge:** While accurate electoral rolls are essential for electoral integrity, excessive documentation requirements or procedural errors can exclude genuine citizens from exercising their franchise.

Democratic Significance

- **Balance Between Integrity and Inclusion:** Electoral reforms must simultaneously prevent fraud, maintain accurate voter rolls and ensure that legitimate citizens are not denied their constitutional right to vote.
- **Due Process:** Any voter-verification mechanism should provide transparent criteria, adequate notice, accessible documentation, correction mechanisms and effective appeals before deletion from electoral rolls.
- **Institutional Independence:** Election-management bodies must retain operational independence and rely on verifiable evidence rather than politically contested claims regarding electoral fraud.

II. Federal structure of the Constitution

1. Criminalisation of Religious Offence in a Secular State

Why in news?

- Punjab's 2026 sacrilege law has renewed debate over criminalising religious offence, free speech and the constitutional commitment to secularism in India.

Punjab's New Sacrilege Law

- **Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Amendment Act:** The law, assented to by the Punjab Governor in April 2026, criminalises sacrilege against the Guru Granth Sahib with punishment extending up to life imprisonment.
- **Expanded Definition:** Sacrilege covers physical desecration such as damaging, defacing, burning, tearing or stealing the Saroop, while also extending to words, signs, visible representations and electronic expressions.
- **Expressive Conduct:** By covering speech and representations that hurt religious feelings, the law moves beyond protection of a sacred object towards criminalisation of certain forms of religious expression.

Constitutional Framework

- **Secularism:** Secularism forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution, requiring the State to maintain principled neutrality among religions while protecting religious freedom.
- **Freedom of Speech:** Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), including grounds relating to public order.
- **Religious Freedom:** Articles 25 to 28 protect freedom of conscience and religious practice while permitting restrictions in the interests of public order, morality, health and other constitutional objectives.
- **Reasonable Restrictions:** The challenge lies in maintaining a balance between protecting citizens from deliberate religious provocation and preventing criminal law from becoming a tool to suppress legitimate expression.

Arguments Supporting Criminalisation

- **Communal Harmony:** Deliberate religious provocation can generate tensions, violence and disturbances, making preventive legal intervention relevant to public order.
- **Protection of Sacred Objects:** Religious scriptures and places of worship have deep cultural and emotional significance for communities and deserve protection against intentional desecration.
- **Historical Experience:** Incidents of sacrilege have previously generated serious communal tensions and public protests, strengthening demands for effective legal protection.
- **Deterrence:** Strict punishment can potentially deter intentional acts designed to provoke religious communities or undermine communal peace.

Arguments Against Excessive Criminalisation

- **Free Speech:** Democratic societies must protect the ability to question, criticise and debate religious ideas, practices and institutions.
- **Secular State:** A secular State should protect individuals and communities without allowing religious sentiment to become an unlimited basis for restricting expression.
- **Social Reform:** Religious criticism has historically played an important role in challenging superstition, discriminatory practices and harmful social customs.
- **Proportionality:** Criminal penalties should correspond to the actual harm caused and distinguish between physical desecration, deliberate incitement and mere criticism.

Comparative Perspective

- **United Kingdom:** England and Wales abolished the common-law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel through the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act, 2008.
- **Scotland:** Scotland subsequently repealed its common-law blasphemy offence, reflecting a broader movement away from criminalising religious offence as such.
- **Indian Approach:** India continues to retain statutory provisions dealing with deliberate religious insult and has increasingly witnessed demands for stronger protection against sacrilege.

Way Forward

- **Clear Definitions:** Laws should precisely distinguish physical desecration, intentional incitement to violence, malicious vilification and legitimate criticism.
- **High Threshold:** Criminal liability for expression should require deliberate and malicious conduct with a demonstrable connection to legally recognised harms rather than mere subjective offence.
- **Procedural Safeguards:** Senior-level scrutiny before registration, investigation and arrest can reduce misuse of religious-offence provisions.
- **Proportional Punishment:** Penalties should follow the principle of proportionality and distinguish between different forms and degrees of harm.
- **Judicial Oversight:** Courts should carefully examine whether restrictions on expression satisfy legality, necessity, proportionality and the constitutional requirement of reasonable restriction.
- **Promoting Dialogue:** Education, interfaith engagement and responsible public discourse should complement criminal law in addressing religious tensions.

III. Parliament and State legislatures

1. Balancing Right to Protest with Public Order

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court hearing petitions concerning alleged disproportionate police force during student protests, raising wider questions about the constitutional right to protest.

Police Action and Public Protests

- **Under-Equipped Police:** Lack of protective equipment can increase police vulnerability and fear, potentially encouraging excessive force. Adequate equipment and training are therefore essential for controlled crowd management.
- **Graduated Use of Force:** International best practices favour a graded response, beginning with communication and negotiation and escalating only when necessary and proportionate to the threat.

Constitutional Right to Protest

- **Article 19 Protection:** The right to peaceful assembly under Article 19(1)(b) and freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) provide constitutional foundations for democratic protest, subject to reasonable restrictions.
- **Protest and Democratic Pressure:** Protests derive political significance partly by creating inconvenience and compelling authorities to respond. Excessive restrictions based solely on administrative convenience can weaken democratic participation.
- **Reasonable Restrictions:** The State may regulate protests to protect public order, security and the rights of others. However, restrictions must satisfy the constitutional **principle of proportionality**.
- **Convenience versus Constitutional Freedom:** Requiring protests to occur only at designated places may facilitate administration, but excessive spatial restrictions can reduce the ability of citizens to effectively communicate dissent.

Public Rights and Disruption

- **Inconvenience is Not Violence:** Peaceful disruption that temporarily inconveniences citizens should not automatically be equated with violence. However, blockades or actions that seriously deprive others of essential rights may legitimately invite restrictions.
- **Balancing Competing Rights:** The State must simultaneously protect protesters' freedoms, prevent violence, maintain essential services and safeguard the rights and safety of uninvolved citizens.
- **Doctrine of Proportionality:** Restrictions should have a legitimate purpose, be suitable for achieving it, be necessary, and maintain a reasonable balance between individual liberty and competing public interests.

Need for Standardised Crowd-Control Protocols

- **Policing as a State Subject:** Under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, police is primarily a State subject, resulting in differences in training, equipment, escalation procedures and documentation across States.
- **National Protocol:** A common framework can establish minimum standards for crowd control while allowing States operational flexibility according to local circumstances.
- **Clear Force Thresholds:** The protocol should specify the circumstances and authorisation levels required before high-impact measures such as lathi charges, tear gas or other coercive methods are deployed.
- **Mandatory Documentation:** Every significant use of force should involve proper documentation, including the reason for escalation, officers involved, injuries caused and medical assistance provided.
- **Independent Oversight:** Serious injuries, deaths and allegations of excessive force should trigger independent investigations to strengthen accountability and public trust.

Way Forward

- **Rights-Based Policing:** Police training should emphasise negotiation, communication, de-escalation, crowd psychology and constitutional rights alongside physical crowd-control capabilities.
- **Better Police Preparedness:** Adequate protective equipment, modern communication systems, body cameras and evidence-preservation mechanisms can reduce both unnecessary force and allegations of misconduct.
- **Judicial Balance:** Courts should protect the right to dissent while recognising that peaceful protest cannot become a justification for violence or disproportionate infringement of the rights of others.

2. Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Why in the news?

- Parliament has passed the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, extending criminal penalties for intentional insult to *Vande Mataram*.

Key Provisions

- **Criminalisation of Insult:** The amendment makes intentional insult to *Vande Mataram* a punishable offence by extending relevant provisions of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act.
- **Parity with National Anthem:** The amendment seeks to place *Vande Mataram* on a similar statutory footing to *Jana Gana Mana* regarding protection against intentional insult and disruption.
- **Punishment:** Offences can attract imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both. A second or subsequent conviction carries a minimum imprisonment of one year.
- **Existing Legal Framework:** The existing law prohibits intentionally preventing the singing of the national anthem or causing disturbance to an assembly engaged in its singing.

Vande Mataram and National Identity

- **Historical Significance:** *Vande Mataram*, composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, played an important role in India's anti-colonial struggle and became an influential symbol of national mobilisation.
- **National Song:** *Vande Mataram* enjoys official recognition as the National Song, while *Jana Gana Mana* is the National Anthem. Their historical and constitutional positions are therefore distinct despite their shared national significance.
- **Cultural Significance:** The song represents an important strand of India's freedom movement and has contributed significantly to the development of national consciousness.

Way Forward

- **Proportionate Regulation:** Criminal penalties should target deliberate acts intended to insult or disrupt national symbols rather than peaceful disagreement, criticism or non-participation.
- **Clear Legal Definitions:** The law should clearly distinguish between intentional insult, legitimate criticism, respectful non-participation and accidental conduct to prevent arbitrary enforcement.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Implementation should remain consistent with fundamental rights, secularism, pluralism, freedom of conscience and the principle of proportionality.
- **Promote Constitutional Patriotism:** National unity is better strengthened through civic education, shared constitutional values and voluntary respect for national symbols rather than coercive displays of patriotism.

3. Parliamentary Disruptions in India

Why in News?

- The Monsoon Session witnessed low parliamentary productivity, with Lok Sabha functioning for 19% and Rajya Sabha for 39% of scheduled time.

Current State of Parliamentary Functioning

- **Low Productivity:** The Monsoon Session recorded substantial disruption, restricting legislative scrutiny, debates, Question Hour and deliberation on important public issues.
- **Legislative Business:** Several Bills were passed amid disruptions, including instances where legislation was cleared through voice votes without substantive parliamentary debate.
- **Declining Deliberation:** Frequent disruptions can weaken Parliament's role as a forum for discussion, accountability, consensus-building and detailed examination of legislation.

Causes of Parliamentary Disruptions

- **Government-Opposition Conflict:** Deep political polarisation can transform Parliament from a deliberative institution into a site of confrontation between the government and Opposition.

- **Demand for Accountability:** Opposition parties often use disruptions to force the government to respond to issues that they believe are not receiving adequate parliamentary attention.
- **Political Incentives:** Parties may view disruptions as an effective way of gaining media attention and mobilising public opinion, particularly before elections.
- **Multiple Regional Issues:** State-specific demands, inter-State disputes and regional movements can also disrupt proceedings and complicate the legislative agenda.

Institutional Consequences

- **Weak Legislative Scrutiny:** Passing Bills without adequate debate reduces opportunities for MPs to examine provisions, identify unintended consequences and suggest improvements.
- **Reduced Executive Accountability:** Disruptions can prevent Question Hour, discussions and parliamentary oversight mechanisms from functioning effectively.
- **Committee Examination:** Important legislation may receive inadequate detailed scrutiny if parliamentary committees are bypassed or legislative proceedings are compressed.
- **Public Money:** Frequent adjournments result in significant loss of productive parliamentary time despite substantial public expenditure on maintaining Parliament.
- **Democratic Representation:** Disruption can undermine citizens' ability to see their representatives debate issues affecting public welfare and national policy.

Impact on Parliamentary Institutions

- **Question Hour:** Repeated disruptions can weaken the principal mechanism through which MPs seek information and hold ministers accountable.
- **Debate and Deliberation:** Parliamentary debate enables competing perspectives to be placed on record and helps improve the quality of legislation.
- **Committee System:** Department-related Standing Committees and Select Committees provide detailed examination that cannot always be undertaken on the floor of the House.
- **Presiding Officers:** The Speaker and Chairperson have an important responsibility to maintain order while ensuring adequate opportunities for both government and Opposition voices.

Need for Institutional Reforms

- **Code of Conduct:** Political parties should strengthen adherence to parliamentary rules and develop enforceable norms against persistent obstruction.
- **Guaranteed Debate:** Mechanisms could ensure that important public issues receive a minimum amount of structured discussion even during periods of political disagreement.
- **Strengthening Committees:** More Bills should undergo detailed committee scrutiny, particularly legislation involving complex economic, social and institutional consequences.
- **Consensus Mechanisms:** Regular meetings between the government, Opposition leaders and presiding officers can help resolve disputes before they result in prolonged disruptions.
- **Time Management:** Parliamentary calendars can provide dedicated time for Opposition-sponsored discussions and government legislative business, reducing incentives for repeated disruptions.

Role of Presiding Officers

- **Impartiality:** Presiding officers should maintain institutional neutrality and ensure that government and Opposition members receive fair opportunities to participate.
- **Rule Enforcement:** Consistent enforcement of parliamentary rules can deter disorder while preventing arbitrary use of disciplinary powers.

- **Disruption Penalties:** Any suspension or disciplinary action should remain proportionate, transparent and consistent with established parliamentary procedures.

Way Forward

- **Dialogue First:** Government and Opposition should prioritise negotiation and structured discussion before resorting to disruption as a political instrument.
- **Institutionalise Opposition Space:** Dedicated time for Opposition issues can provide legitimate channels for raising matters of urgent public concern.
- **Committee-Centred Parliament:** Greater reliance on parliamentary committees can improve technical scrutiny, bipartisan engagement and evidence-based lawmaking.
- **Public Accountability:** Parliamentary performance indicators should focus not merely on the number of Bills passed but also on quality of debate, committee scrutiny and executive accountability.
- **Technological Monitoring:** Digital parliamentary records and transparent productivity data can strengthen public awareness of parliamentary functioning.

IV. The Judiciary

1. Fast-track Courts and Promise of Speedy Justice

Why in News?

- The proposed fast-track courts for examination paper leaks have renewed debate over whether specialised courts can deliver speedy justice without merely shifting judicial backlogs.

Fast-Track Courts: Concept and Rationale

- **Objective:** Fast-track courts are specialised judicial mechanisms intended to expedite the disposal of particular categories of cases by prioritising them within the justice delivery system.
- **Need for Specialisation:** Cases involving examination fraud, sexual offences, cybercrime or other specialised offences may require focused judicial attention, technical expertise and coordinated investigation.
- **The Capacity Challenge:** Merely reallocating existing judges to fast-track courts does not necessarily increase judicial capacity. It can accelerate priority cases while simultaneously pushing ordinary cases further down the queue.

Effectiveness of Fast-Track Courts

- **Speed versus Backlog:** Fast-track courts can dispose of designated cases faster, but their effectiveness depends on whether additional judges, prosecutors, investigators, forensic facilities and support staff are created.
- **Resource Constraints:** Shortages of judicial officers, public prosecutors, forensic experts and administrative staff can prevent specialised courts from achieving their intended timelines.
- **Systemic Displacement:** If judges are transferred from regular courts to fast-track courts, the backlog may simply migrate from one category of cases to another.
- **Pendency in Fast-Track Special Courts:** Fast-Track Special Courts dealing with rape and offences under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act continue to face substantial pendency, indicating that specialised designation alone does not guarantee speedy justice.

Broader Judicial Pendency

- **Trial Court Burden:** Trial courts face an enormous backlog, with the majority of pending cases being criminal matters. This places significant pressure on judges, prosecutors, investigators and forensic institutions.

- **Judicial Vacancies:** Persistent vacancies reduce the effective strength of the judiciary and constrain the ability of courts to absorb new cases while simultaneously reducing existing pendency.
- **Investigation Delays:** Delayed investigation, incomplete chargesheets, forensic backlogs and difficulties in securing witnesses can slow trials even after a case reaches a fast-track court.

Article 14 and Case Selection

- **Equality Before Law:** Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws. Arbitrary classification of cases for special treatment can therefore raise constitutional concerns.
- **Rational Classification:** Cases should be selected for fast-track treatment using objective criteria such as social impact, vulnerability of victims, complexity, urgency and the need for specialised expertise.
- **Avoiding Popular Pressure:** Allocation of cases should not merely respond to media attention or public sentiment. Transparent and rational criteria are essential for maintaining judicial legitimacy.

Way Forward

- **Additional Judicial Capacity:** New judges and support personnel should accompany the creation of specialised courts rather than simply reallocating existing judicial resources.
- **Integrated Justice Delivery:** Investigation, prosecution, forensic examination and adjudication should operate as a coordinated chain, since delays at any stage undermine the entire process.
- **Specialisation with Accountability:** Specialised courts should have clearly defined mandates, performance indicators and periodic independent evaluation to determine whether they actually improve disposal times.
- **Permanent Structural Reform:** Fast-track courts should supplement, not substitute, broader reforms involving judicial recruitment, police modernisation, prosecution strengthening, forensic infrastructure and court management.

2. Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026

Why in News?

- The Lok Sabha passed the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026 amid Opposition protests, proposing a National Tribunals Commission to oversee appointments and strengthen transparency.

Background of Tribunals

- **Purpose:** Tribunals are specialised adjudicatory bodies established to resolve disputes requiring technical expertise and reduce the burden on regular courts.
- **Need for Reform:** Concerns regarding appointment procedures, tenure, service conditions, vacancies and administrative control have repeatedly raised questions about tribunal independence and efficiency.
- **Judicial Intervention:** The Supreme Court has intervened several times to ensure that tribunal structures comply with separation of powers, judicial independence and constitutional principles.

National Tribunals Commission

- **Institutional Framework:** The Bill proposes a National Tribunals Commission headquartered in New Delhi to oversee appointments and service-related matters concerning various national tribunals.
- **Composition:** The Commission will comprise a Chairperson, two judicial members and two technical members, combining judicial experience with professional expertise.
- **Chairperson:** A retired Supreme Court judge or retired Chief Justice of a High Court will be eligible to head the Commission.

Functions of the Commission

- **Appointments:** The Commission will oversee the selection and appointment of chairpersons and members of various tribunals, creating a more uniform institutional mechanism.
- **Service Conditions:** It will deal with salaries, allowances, tenure, resignation, removal and other service conditions of tribunal members.
- **Transparency:** A centralised and standardised appointment mechanism is intended to reduce inconsistencies and improve transparency in the functioning of tribunals.
- **Independence:** Greater institutional separation from executive departments can strengthen the perceived and functional independence of tribunals.

Supreme Court's Concerns

- **Separation of Powers:** The Supreme Court had struck down provisions of the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021, citing concerns relating to separation of powers and judicial independence.
- **Appointment Standards:** Judicial decisions have emphasised transparent procedures and appropriate standards regarding appointments, tenure and functioning of tribunal members.
- **Independent Commission:** The Court had called for an independent National Tribunals Commission with professional expertise, transparent selection procedures and effective oversight.

Significance of the Bill

- **Uniformity:** A common framework can reduce variations in recruitment, tenure and service conditions across different tribunals.
- **Efficiency:** Professionalised administration and timely appointments could reduce vacancies and improve the speed of specialised dispute resolution.
- **Judicial Decongestion:** Effective tribunals can reduce the workload of constitutional and regular courts by providing specialised forums for adjudication.
- **Specialised Expertise:** Technical members can contribute domain-specific knowledge in areas such as taxation, company law, finance and administrative regulation.

Independence and Accountability

- **Executive Influence:** The appointment process must maintain sufficient distance from the executive to prevent excessive governmental influence over adjudicatory bodies.
- **Judicial Independence:** Tribunal members exercise adjudicatory functions; therefore, their selection, tenure and removal must protect decisional independence.
- **Accountability:** Independence must be accompanied by transparent performance evaluation, ethical standards and institutional accountability.

Challenges

- **Vacancies:** Persistent vacancies can undermine the very objective of establishing specialised tribunals and increase delays in dispute resolution.
- **Multiplicity of Tribunals:** The existence of numerous tribunals with different structures and jurisdictions can create administrative complexity and inconsistent standards.
- **Executive Control:** Excessive executive involvement in appointments or service conditions may compromise public confidence in tribunal autonomy.
- **Parliamentary Scrutiny:** Passage of significant institutional legislation without substantive debate raises concerns regarding legislative deliberation and accountability.

Way Forward

- **Independent Selection:** Appointment procedures should involve transparent, merit-based and institutionally balanced selection mechanisms.
- **Security of Tenure:** Fixed and reasonable tenure with safeguards against arbitrary removal can strengthen tribunal independence.
- **Adequate Resources:** Tribunals require sufficient judges, technical members, infrastructure, digital facilities and administrative support to deliver timely justice.
- **Performance Monitoring:** Regular evaluation should focus on disposal rates, pendency, vacancies, quality of decisions and accessibility without compromising judicial independence.
- **Clear Jurisdiction:** Overlapping jurisdictions should be minimised to prevent forum shopping, procedural confusion and unnecessary litigation.

3. Legal Aid Defence Counsels (LADCs) Scheme

Why in News?

- The National Legal Services Authority recently directed non-renewal of Legal Aid Defence Counsels' contracts, triggering concerns over legal aid, private practice and fair-trial rights.

Background

- **Legal Aid:** Article 39A of the Constitution directs the State to provide free legal aid and ensure that justice is not denied because of economic or other disabilities.
- **National Legal Services Authority:** The National Legal Services Authority is a statutory body established under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free and competent legal services to weaker sections and organise Lok Adalats.
- **Legal Aid Defence Counsel Scheme:** The scheme provides dedicated lawyers through legal services institutions for representing accused persons who cannot afford private counsel in criminal cases.

Why LADCs Matter

- **Quality Representation:** Dedicated defence lawyers can provide continuous representation, timely applications, effective bail assistance and protection of procedural rights.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Unlike traditional panel-based legal aid, LADCs function within an institutional framework with defined responsibilities, monitoring and professional accountability.
- **Fair Trial:** Effective legal representation is an essential component of a fair criminal justice system, particularly because accused persons face deprivation of liberty and serious consequences.

Concerns Raised by Bar Associations

- **Parallel Criminal Bar:** Bar Associations have argued that dedicated LADCs could create a parallel criminal defence structure and affect the professional opportunities of practising advocates.
- **Livelihood Concerns:** Expansion of institutionalised legal aid may reduce the pool of cases available to private lawyers who traditionally undertake legal-aid assignments.
- **Professional Independence:** Concerns have also been raised regarding the institutional nature of LADC appointments and their potential implications for the independence of the legal profession.

Challenges within the LADC Model

- **Experience:** Criminal defence requires specialised skills in investigation, case preparation, bail, remand proceedings, cross-examination and trial strategy.

- **Young Lawyers:** Assigning complex criminal matters to inexperienced lawyers without adequate supervision may compromise the quality of representation received by economically vulnerable accused persons.
- **Training:** Young advocates require structured training, mentoring and exposure to criminal procedure before independently handling serious trials.
- **Workload:** Excessive caseloads, inadequate administrative support and insufficient remuneration could undermine the effectiveness of dedicated defence counsel.

Way Forward

- **Protect Continuity:** Existing accused persons should not lose effective representation because of abrupt termination or non-renewal of LADC contracts.
- **Strengthen Accountability:** Performance-based renewal, transparent monitoring and grievance-redress mechanisms can ensure quality without compromising professional independence.
- **Adequate Resources:** LADCs require appropriate remuneration, research assistance, clerical support and access to investigative and forensic resources.
- **National Standards:** Uniform minimum standards should coexist with State-level flexibility to account for differences in criminal caseloads and legal-service infrastructure.

4. Supreme Court Examining Polygamy

Polygamy, Muslim Personal Law and Constitutional Equality

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court has sought the Centre's response on a petition challenging polygamy under Muslim personal law and asked it to consider legislative abolition.

Constitutional Provisions Involved

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws, forming the principal constitutional basis for challenging discriminatory legal provisions.
- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination by the State on grounds including religion and sex, while permitting constitutionally sanctioned affirmative measures.
- **Article 16:** Guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment and is relevant to the petitioners' broader constitutional equality argument, although its direct application to personal law requires careful examination.
- **Article 25:** Protects freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, health and other fundamental rights.

Polygamy and Religion

- **Religious Interpretation:** The Quran permits a man to marry up to four women under specified circumstances but links the permission to the requirement of treating wives equally.
- **Monogamy Argument:** The interpretation presented by the petitioners is that the requirement of complete justice between multiple wives makes monogamy the preferred practical norm.
- **Constitutional Question:** Courts must distinguish between religious belief, religious practice and practices that can legitimately be subjected to social and constitutional regulation.

Arguments Supporting Abolition

- **Gender Equality:** Critics argue that allowing a husband to have multiple wives while women cannot similarly contract multiple marriages creates an asymmetrical marital relationship.
- **Dignity and Autonomy:** A legal system committed to individual dignity may be required to examine whether polygamy adversely affects women's autonomy, security and equal status within marriage.

- **Uniformity:** Abolishing polygamy across communities could establish a common civil standard governing monogamous marriage.
- **Legal Certainty:** Compulsory registration of marriages and divorces could prevent concealment of existing marriages and provide stronger legal protection to spouses and children.

Arguments against Judicial Abolition

- **Religious Freedom:** Opponents may argue that judicially invalidating a personal-law practice could interfere with Article 25 and the autonomy of religious communities.
- **Legislative Domain:** Determining the future of personal laws involves complex questions of social reform, religious freedom and competing interests that may be better addressed through Parliament.
- **Pluralism:** India's constitutional framework accommodates religious and cultural diversity while permitting reform where constitutionally justified.
- **Need for Evidence:** The prevalence, socio-economic impact and actual consequences of polygamy should be established through reliable empirical studies rather than assumptions.

Marriage Registration

- **Compulsory Registration:** Mandatory registration of all marriages can improve legal certainty, prevent fraudulent remarriages and establish documentary proof of marital status.
- **Protection of First Wife:** Effective registration and accessible databases can help spouses identify existing marriages and strengthen legal remedies against unlawful remarriage.
- **Children's Rights:** Legal mechanisms should ensure that children are protected from disputes concerning maintenance, inheritance, residence and legitimacy.

Uniform Civil Code Debate

- **Article 44:** The Directive Principles encourage the State to endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for citizens throughout India.
- **Common Civil Standards:** Regulation of marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption through gender-neutral and religion-neutral principles could strengthen substantive equality.
- **Gradual Reform:** A rights-based approach can prioritise universally accepted principles such as consent, monogamy, maintenance, inheritance rights and protection from arbitrary divorce.

Challenges Before the Court

- **Personal Law Question:** The Court will have to determine the precise constitutional status of the Shariat Application Act and whether the challenged practice is subject to fundamental-rights scrutiny.
- **Scope of Article 25:** The relationship between religious freedom and gender equality will remain central to determining whether polygamy receives constitutional protection.
- **Judicial Restraint:** The Court may consider whether abolition should be judicially mandated or left to Parliament following comprehensive consultation and legislative deliberation.
- **Centre's Role:** The government may be required to explain its policy position and whether it intends to undertake legislative reform concerning polygamy.

Way Forward

- **Gender-Just Reform:** Any reform should prioritise equality, dignity, consent and protection from exploitation without targeting a religious community.
- **Codification:** A carefully drafted personal-law framework can reduce ambiguity while ensuring compatibility with constitutional rights.

- **Compulsory Registration:** Universal and accessible marriage registration should be strengthened irrespective of religion.
- **Empirical Research:** Reliable data on the prevalence and socio-economic consequences of polygamy should inform legislative decisions.
- **Consultation:** Reform should involve women's organisations, religious scholars, legal experts, affected communities and constitutional institutions.

V. Representation of People's Act

1. The Stakes in India's Delimitation Debate

Why in the news?

- The proposed post-2027 Census delimitation has revived concerns over regional representation, federal balance, women's reservation, electoral fairness and the distribution of Lok Sabha seats.

What is Delimitation?

- **Meaning:** Delimitation refers to the redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries and, where constitutionally provided, the reallocation of seats among States based on population.
- **Constitutional Basis:** Articles 81 and 82 provide the framework for readjustment of Lok Sabha seats and delimitation after publication of the first Census conducted after 2026.
- **Current Position:** Lok Sabha seat allocation among States continues to broadly reflect the 1971 Census, following constitutional decisions to defer population-based redistribution.

Why was Delimitation Frozen?

- **Population Stabilisation:** The freeze was intended to ensure that States which successfully implemented population-control measures were not penalised through reduced political representation.
- **Federal Balance:** Maintaining the existing allocation helped prevent large population-growth States from acquiring disproportionately greater influence over national policymaking.
- **One Person, One Vote:** However, prolonged freezing has created differences in the number of electors represented by Members of Parliament across States.

Impact of Census 2027

- **Trigger for Redistribution:** Once the 2027 Census data are published, the existing constitutional framework would trigger readjustment of Lok Sabha seats among States unless constitutional provisions are changed.
- **Likely Regional Impact:** Population-growth States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan are expected to gain representation, while several southern States could see their relative share decline.
- **Representation Gap:** A Member of Parliament from Kerala currently represents substantially fewer electors than Members of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, reflecting the accumulated demographic divergence.
- **Federalism:** States that controlled population growth argue that their developmental success should not result in reduced political influence within the Union.
- **Democratic Equality:** Population-based representation supports the principle of equal voting power by ensuring that constituencies broadly contain comparable numbers of voters.
- **Balancing Principles:** The delimitation exercise must reconcile federal equality among States with democratic equality among individual voters.

Gerrymandering and Electoral Outcomes

- **Meaning:** Gerrymandering refers to manipulating electoral boundaries to advantage particular political groups, potentially distorting the relationship between votes received and seats won.
- **Cracking:** Supporters of a political party can be deliberately dispersed across constituencies so that their votes remain insufficient to secure victories.
- **Packing:** Supporters can also be concentrated into a limited number of constituencies, allowing them to win some seats by large margins while weakening their influence elsewhere.
- **Indian Context:** An independent and transparent delimitation process is essential to prevent boundary changes from becoming an instrument for partisan electoral advantage.

Women's Reservation

- **Constitutional Linkage:** The Constitution provides for reservation of one-third of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly seats for women, with implementation linked to delimitation following the relevant Census.
- **Representation:** Delimitation therefore provides an opportunity to operationalise women's reservation while ensuring equitable distribution across regions.
- **Rotation and Boundaries:** The allocation and rotation of reserved constituencies could significantly influence electoral competition and political representation.

Political and Federal Concerns

- **Southern States:** States with lower population growth may perceive seat redistribution as a penalty for successful demographic transition and effective public policy.
- **Northern States:** Higher population-growth States can argue that continued under-representation violates the democratic principle that political representation should reflect current population.
- **Centre-State Relations:** If not handled through broad political consensus, delimitation could intensify tensions within India's federal structure.

Way Forward

- **Constitutional Consensus:** Parliament should pursue broad political agreement before altering the existing constitutional framework governing seat allocation and delimitation.
- **Balanced Formula:** A mechanism could combine population-based representation with safeguards for States that have achieved demographic stabilisation.
- **Independent Process:** The Delimitation Commission should operate with institutional independence, transparent methodology and clearly defined criteria.
- **Data-Based Delimitation:** Census data, electoral rolls, geographic contiguity and administrative considerations should form the basis of constituency boundaries.
- **Protecting Federalism:** Any redistribution should avoid creating perceptions that States are being rewarded or penalised solely on the basis of demographic performance.
- **Ensuring Electoral Fairness:** Publicly disclosed criteria, stakeholder consultation and judicially reviewable procedures can reduce the risk of partisan boundary manipulation.

B. GOVERNANCE

I. Government policies and Interventions

1. Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026

Why in the news?

- Parliament passed the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, amid concerns over examination paper leaks, student protests, and declining public trust.

Key Provisions of the Amendment Bill

- Individuals:** Imprisonment has been enhanced from three-five years to five-ten years, while the maximum fine has increased from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh, strengthening individual-level deterrence.
- Service Providers:** The maximum fine has been increased from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore, while the prohibition on handling public examinations has been extended from four to eight years.
- Directors and Senior Management:** For guilty directors, senior management or persons in charge of service-provider firms, minimum imprisonment rises from three to five years and the fine from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore.
- Organised Crime:** The punishment for organised examination fraud has been strengthened from five-ten years to a minimum of seven years, with the fine increased from ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore.
- Fast-Track Courts:** The Bill provides statutory backing for fast-track courts to hear offences under the Act, aiming to reduce delays and deliver timely justice.
- Time-Bound Investigation and Trial:** Fast-track courts are required to complete investigation and trial within five months, seeking to prevent prolonged uncertainty for students and examination authorities.
- Special Task Force:** The Union government is empowered to establish a Special Task Force for investigating offences, enabling specialised investigation of complex and organised examination-related crimes.

Significance of the Amendment

- Restoring Public Trust:** Stronger punishment can reassure students and citizens that examination integrity is being protected through credible enforcement mechanisms.
- Protecting Meritocracy:** Transparent examinations ensure that selection is based on merit rather than financial capacity, technological manipulation, criminal networks or privileged access to question papers.
- Curbing Organised Networks:** Higher penalties for organised crime and service providers target the institutional and commercial networks that facilitate examination fraud rather than focusing only on individual offenders.
- Improving Institutional Credibility:** Effective enforcement can strengthen the credibility of bodies such as the National Testing Agency and other public examination authorities.

Concerns and Challenges

- Punishment versus Prevention:** Severe penalties alone cannot prevent paper leaks unless examination systems are simultaneously strengthened through secure question-paper generation, storage, transportation and digital safeguards.
- Fast-Track Courts and Pendency:** Despite their intended purpose, significant case pendency demonstrates that creating specialised courts does not automatically guarantee speedy justice.
- Capacity Constraints:** Successful implementation requires adequate judges, prosecutors, investigators, forensic infrastructure, technological expertise and administrative support.
- Federal Coordination:** Effective coordination between Union and State authorities will therefore be essential.

- **Due Process and Fair Trial:** Stronger criminal provisions must operate alongside principles of natural justice, presumption of innocence, evidentiary standards and judicial oversight to prevent arbitrary prosecution.

Way Forward

- **Secure Examination Architecture:** Authorities should adopt end-to-end security covering question-paper creation, encryption, storage, transportation, examination centres and digital access, with strict audit trails.
- **Institutional Accountability:** Responsibility should extend beyond students and immediate offenders to officials, contractors and service providers whose negligence, collusion or deliberate misconduct facilitates examination malpractice.
- **Technology and Cybersecurity:** Artificial intelligence-based anomaly detection, encryption, secure digital repositories and real-time monitoring can reduce vulnerabilities while requiring strong cybersecurity protocols.
- **Strengthening Investigation Capacity:** Specialised investigators and forensic capabilities should be developed to trace digital evidence, financial transactions, communication networks and organised examination syndicates.
- **Judicial Capacity:** Fast-track courts should be accompanied by adequate judicial infrastructure and regular monitoring so that statutory timelines do not remain merely aspirational.
- **Transparent Governance:** Examination authorities should communicate clearly about irregularities, corrective measures, investigation progress and affected candidates to prevent rumours and restore confidence.

2. Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026

Why in the news?

- The Lok Sabha has passed the **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026**.

Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026

- **Objective:** The Bill seeks to amend the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 by making delayed registration more stringent and encouraging timely reporting of births and deaths.
- **Delayed Registration:** Where registration is sought after one year but within two years, approval of the District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate or authorised Executive Magistrate is required after verification of authenticity.
- **Registration After Two Years:** Where reporting occurs after two years, registration requires an order from a Judicial Magistrate of the First Class along with verification of the authenticity of the event.
- **Mandatory Registration:** Birth and death registration is mandatory, and certificates provide legally recognised evidence of an individual's identity and vital life events.

Data Over the Years

- Until 2000, India registered only 56% of births and 48% of deaths. By 2014, this figure rose to around 86.6% and 72.5%, respectively.
- In 2024, birth registration reached 99.1% and death registration reached 99.4%.
 - The improvement is also visible across states, in 2024, 18 states and Union Territories achieved 100% birth registration, while 21 states and UTs achieved 100% death registration.

Registration of Births and Deaths in India

- The registration of births and deaths is mandatory, and the certificate issued provides legal identity to an individual.
- Data on births, deaths and stillbirths are recorded under a continuous and compulsory mechanism known as the Civil Registration System (CRS).

- It serves as a foundational source of India's population data such as estimated births and deaths, for the accurate estimation of mortality, fertility and sex ratio at birth.
- It functions under the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India under the Home Ministry.
- The CRS has been legally operational since 1970, though the coverage and completeness of reporting were historically poor.
- The system operates under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, which was amended in 2023.
- Births and deaths are ordinarily required to be reported within 21 days.
- In hospitals, the medical officer in charge or an authorised official is responsible for reporting such events.
- For events at home, responsibility generally lies with the head of the household or another prescribed informant.

Importance of Birth Registration

- **Legal Identity:** Birth certificates establish proof of identity and age and facilitate access to education, healthcare, social security and other public services.
- **Citizenship and Documentation:** Reliable civil registration systems help establish demographic records and can support verification of claims relating to citizenship and legal status.
- **Access to Welfare:** Accurate birth records enable governments to identify beneficiaries, plan welfare interventions and reduce exclusion from public schemes.
- **Death Registration:** Death certificates are important for inheritance, property transfer, insurance claims, pensions and the removal of deceased persons from government databases.
- **Public Health Planning:** Reliable birth and death statistics enable governments to monitor mortality, fertility, disease patterns and demographic changes.

3. Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2026

Why in the news?

- The Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026 was introduced in Lok Sabha.

Background and Significance

- **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI):** ISI, Kolkata, is a premier institution for education, research and training in statistics, mathematics, economics and allied disciplines. It is currently registered as a society under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961.
- **Need for New Legislation:** The Bill seeks to replace the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959 and provide ISI with a contemporary statutory framework suited to interdisciplinary research, technological advancement and global academic collaboration.

Legal Status and Incorporation

- **Body Corporate:** The Bill proposes to convert ISI into a body corporate and a not-for-profit legal entity, providing it with a distinct statutory identity and institutional framework.
- **Institutional Autonomy:** The proposed framework seeks to balance academic and administrative autonomy with accountability through statutory bodies, performance reviews and government oversight.

Objectives of ISI

- **Advancing Statistical Sciences:** ISI will focus on advancing and disseminating knowledge in statistical sciences and allied fields, strengthening India's statistical and analytical capabilities.
- **Interdisciplinary Research:** The Bill promotes research across statistics, mathematics, economics, computer science and other disciplines, encouraging integrated solutions to complex socioeconomic problems.

- **Industry-Academia-Government Linkages:** Greater collaboration among industry, academia and government can promote practical applications of statistical knowledge in policymaking, technology and economic development.
- **Global Centre of Excellence:** The Bill aims to develop ISI into a global centre of excellence in statistical sciences and allied fields, enhancing India's research and educational standing.

Importance for India

- **Evidence-Based Governance:** A stronger ISI can support evidence-based policymaking by improving statistical research, data analysis and quantitative assessment of government programmes.
- **Data-Driven Economy:** Advanced statistical capabilities are increasingly important for artificial intelligence, digital governance, economic forecasting, financial technology and emerging data-driven industries.
- **Human Capital:** Strengthening interdisciplinary education can create highly skilled professionals capable of addressing India's requirements in statistics, economics, computing and quantitative sciences.
- **Research and Innovation:** Greater collaboration between academia, government and industry can accelerate the translation of statistical research into practical innovations and public policy solutions.

Concerns and Challenges

- **Autonomy versus Oversight:** Greater government involvement in appointments and directions may raise concerns about institutional autonomy and the independence of academic and research decision-making.
- **Centralised Governance:** The role of the Visitor and central government in key appointments and approvals must be balanced against the need for professional and academic autonomy.
- **Financial Dependence:** Continued government involvement in budgets and creation of posts could constrain institutional flexibility unless adequate financial and administrative autonomy is ensured.
- **Accountability:** Institutional expansion and greater autonomy should be accompanied by transparent performance evaluation, financial auditing and measurable academic outcomes.

Way Forward

- **Academic Autonomy:** Governance mechanisms should protect academic freedom and ensure that appointments, research priorities and academic decisions remain guided primarily by professional expertise.
- **Transparent Appointments:** Selection of senior leadership should follow transparent, merit-based and multidisciplinary procedures to strengthen institutional credibility.
- **Research Ecosystem:** ISI should deepen partnerships with universities, industry, government agencies and international institutions to develop cutting-edge statistical research.
- **Responsible Data Governance:** ISI can contribute to India's data ecosystem by promoting statistical integrity, methodological rigour, privacy protection and responsible use of emerging technologies.

4. National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC) (Amendment) Bill

Why in News?

- The National Co-operative Development Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was introduced in Lok Sabha on August 10, 2026, seeking to expand cooperative development and financing.

Background

- **National Co-operative Development Corporation:** The National Co-operative Development Corporation is a statutory corporation established under the National Co-operative Development Corporation Act, 1962 to plan, promote and finance cooperative programmes.

- **Need for Amendment:** The proposed changes seek to broaden the Corporation's functional scope, expand eligible beneficiaries and strengthen access to finance, investment and information for cooperative development.

Expanded Functions

- **Co-operative Development:** Instead of financing programmes implemented only through cooperative societies in specified sectors, the Corporation will broadly plan, promote and finance cooperative development.
- **Wider Assistance:** Co-operative development is defined as providing assistance directly or through intermediaries to cooperative societies, thereby creating a broader institutional mandate.

Expanded Definition of Foodstuffs

- **Processed Food:** The Bill expands foodstuffs beyond conventional items such as eggs, milk, meat and vegetables to include processed food and other edible products.
- **Government Notification:** The Central Government may also notify additional food items, enabling the definition to adapt to changing consumption patterns and cooperative activities.

Expansion to Industrial Goods

- **Removal of Rural Restriction:** The existing framework covers industrial goods produced by specified entities situated in rural areas. The Bill removes this geographical requirement.
- **Broader Industrial Cooperatives:** Industrial cooperatives, cottage and village industries and allied industries located outside rural areas can therefore potentially benefit from the Corporation's activities.

Wider Financing Eligibility

- **State Governments:** State governments may extend Corporation funding to any entity engaged in cooperative development rather than restricting assistance to cooperative societies alone.
- **Direct Assistance:** The Corporation may directly provide loans and grants to cooperative societies or other entities engaged in cooperative development.
- **Diversification of Beneficiaries:** The expanded eligibility can improve access to institutional finance for cooperative institutions operating across agriculture, food processing, industry and other sectors.

Significance

- **Cooperative Sector:** Expanded financing and investment mechanisms can strengthen cooperatives as instruments of collective economic activity and member-owned enterprise.
- **Rural and Urban Linkages:** Removing the rural-location restriction can allow cooperative development to respond to changing economic structures and growing linkages between rural producers and urban markets.
- **Value Addition:** Inclusion of processed food can encourage cooperatives to move beyond primary production towards processing, branding, storage and marketing.
- **Employment Generation:** Stronger cooperatives can support entrepreneurship, local employment, value addition and income generation, particularly among small producers.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Greater access to institutional finance can reduce dependence on informal credit and strengthen the economic capacity of cooperative societies.

Potential Challenges

- **Government Oversight:** Expanded Central Government approval and information-sharing powers should not result in excessive bureaucratic control over autonomous cooperative institutions.
- **Cooperative Autonomy:** Financial assistance should strengthen member-owned institutions without compromising democratic management and decision-making within cooperatives.

- **Credit Risk:** Expansion of lending and investment to a wider range of entities requires robust appraisal, monitoring and recovery mechanisms.
- **Data Protection:** Sharing credit and other information among multiple institutions requires safeguards for confidentiality, data security and responsible use.
- **Implementation Capacity:** The Corporation will require adequate professional expertise to assess diverse projects spanning agriculture, food processing, industry and other sectors.

Way Forward

- **Transparent Financing:** Clear eligibility criteria, objective appraisal standards and transparent allocation mechanisms should guide loans, grants and investments.
- **Strengthening Governance:** Cooperatives receiving public financial support should maintain sound accounting, professional management, member participation and effective internal controls.
- **Value-Chain Approach:** Financing should support the complete cooperative value chain, including production, processing, storage, branding, logistics and market access.
- **Digital Information Systems:** Secure digital systems can improve credit assessment and monitoring while ensuring appropriate safeguards for financial and personal information.
- **Member-Centric Development:** Expansion of the cooperative sector should ultimately strengthen member incomes, bargaining power, participation and economic resilience rather than merely increasing institutional size.

5. Creamy Layer and Sub-Categorisation among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Why in News?

- The Union government has opposed introducing a creamy layer exclusion for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Supreme Court, while supporting evidence-based review.

Background

- **Constitutional Reservation:** Articles 15(4), 15(5) and 16(4) enable special provisions and reservation for socially and educationally backward classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to address historical exclusion and inadequate representation.
- **Davinder Singh Judgment, 2024:** A seven-judge Supreme Court Bench recognised heterogeneity and graded backwardness within Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and allowed States to sub-categorise these groups.

What is Sub-Categorisation?

- **Meaning:** Sub-categorisation divides an existing reservation quota among relatively different groups within a broad reserved category to ensure that historically underrepresented communities receive a fairer share.
- **Objective:** It seeks to address internal inequalities where certain communities within the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Other Backward Classes may receive disproportionately greater benefits.
- **State Practice:** Several State governments have pursued sub-categorisation among reserved groups, making it an important instrument of targeted affirmative action.

What is the Creamy Layer Concept?

- **Meaning:** The creamy layer principle excludes relatively advanced individuals or families within a backward category from reservation benefits on the premise that they have overcome some disadvantages affecting the wider community.
- **Other Backward Classes:** The principle was established for Other Backward Classes through the Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney judgment of 1992.

- **Purpose:** It seeks to prevent repeated capture of reservation benefits by relatively better-off sections and enable benefits to reach those facing greater disadvantage.

Centre's Opposition to Creamy Layer for SCs and STs

- **Distinct Nature of SC/ST Status:** The Union government argues that Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe status is linked to historically entrenched social discrimination and community-based exclusion, rather than merely economic or educational backwardness.
- **Parliamentary Authority:** The Centre contends that excluding communities or individuals from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe reservation would involve modifying the reservation framework, a matter that falls within Parliament's domain.
- **Lack of Judicial Precedent:** The government argues that existing judicial precedent has not mandated creamy layer exclusion for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Empirical Review:** The Centre has indicated that any major modification should follow a comprehensive review and empirical study using socio-economic data on reservation beneficiaries.

Centre's Position on Sub-Categorisation

- **Unclear National Policy:** While the Centre has not clearly articulated a comprehensive national framework for sub-categorisation among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, the issue has received significant attention.
- **Other Backward Classes:** The National Commission for Backward Classes recommended sub-categorisation among Other Backward Classes, following which the government established the Justice G. Rohini Commission in 2017.
- **Rohini Commission:** The Commission submitted its report several years ago, but its recommendations have not been publicly implemented.
- **Scheduled Castes:** The Union government also constituted an internal committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary to examine grievances relating to the Madiga community and the equitable distribution of Scheduled Caste reservation benefits.

Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

- **Articles 341 and 342:** The President specifies Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for States and Union Territories, while Parliament has the power to include or exclude groups from these constitutional lists.
- **State Power:** The Davinder Singh judgment recognised that States can undertake sub-classification within the existing Scheduled Caste lists subject to constitutional requirements.
- **Judicial Review:** Any classification must satisfy constitutional principles of equality and should be based on objective evidence rather than arbitrary political considerations.

Need for Data

- **Evidence-Based Policy:** Reliable socio-economic and representation data are necessary to determine which communities remain underrepresented and whether reservation benefits are equitably distributed.
- **Beneficiary Data:** A comprehensive database should examine education, government employment, income, occupation, geographical disadvantage and representation across different communities.
- **Periodic Review:** Reservation policies should incorporate periodic evidence-based assessments while recognising that social discrimination cannot be measured solely through income.

Way Forward

- **Avoid Economic Reductionism:** Creamy layer criteria for SCs and STs, if ever considered, should not rely solely on income because caste-based discrimination can persist despite economic mobility.

- **Community-Specific Assessment:** Any sub-categorisation should be based on measurable evidence of educational and employment underrepresentation among different communities.
- **Transparent Criteria:** Objective, publicly available criteria should govern both sub-categorisation and any potential exclusion mechanism.
- **Independent Study:** An independent expert body can examine socio-economic data, representation patterns and the impact of existing reservation policies before policy changes are introduced.
- **Political Consensus:** Since reservation directly affects social justice and federal relations, reforms require consultation among Parliament, States, constitutional bodies and affected communities.

II. Developmental processes and Development industry

1. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in India

Why in News?

- India's success with digital identity, payments and data infrastructure has sparked debate on extending the Digital Public Infrastructure model to make artificial intelligence inference affordable and widely accessible.

India's Digital Public Infrastructure Model

- **Integrated Digital Rails:** India's distinctive strength lies in integrating Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface and Account Aggregator into interoperable public digital rails covering identity, payments and consent-based data sharing.
- **Aadhaar as Digital Identity:** Aadhaar enabled large-scale digital identity verification, transforming identity authentication from a paper-intensive process into a low-cost, interoperable digital service.
- **Unified Payments Interface:** Unified Payments Interface created an interoperable payments ecosystem where banks and applications can communicate through common standards, dramatically reducing transaction friction and expanding digital payments.
- **Account Aggregator Framework:** The Account Aggregator framework enables consent-based financial data sharing, allowing individuals to securely share information across financial institutions while reducing information asymmetry.

Artificial Intelligence as Foundational Infrastructure

- **From Software to Infrastructure:** Artificial Intelligence is increasingly becoming a foundational technology affecting healthcare, education, agriculture, governance, research and business rather than merely a premium software product.
- **India's Strategic Challenge:** India possesses substantial engineering talent, data resources and a large digital user base, but remains dependent on foreign companies for frontier models, advanced computing infrastructure and proprietary application programming interfaces.
- **Risk of Value Extraction:** Excessive dependence on foreign Artificial Intelligence models could result in India exporting talent and data while importing intelligence services at prices determined by overseas technology companies.
- **Inference over Training:** India need not necessarily compete with hyperscalers in the expensive race to train the largest frontier models. A more practical strategy is to reduce the cost of Artificial Intelligence inference and make access widely affordable.

Applications for Inclusive Development

- **Healthcare:** Artificial Intelligence trained on Indian medical and linguistic contexts could assist healthcare workers with diagnosis support, documentation, translation and patient communication.

- **Education:** Affordable Artificial Intelligence tutors could provide personalised learning support to students in regional languages, helping address disparities in teacher availability and educational resources.
- **Agriculture:** Farmers could access voice-based advisory services, crop information, insurance assistance and government schemes in local languages, reducing language and information barriers.
- **Small Businesses:** Affordable Artificial Intelligence tools could help millions of small enterprises with accounting, marketing, customer support, translation, compliance and business planning.
- **Governance:** Multilingual Artificial Intelligence systems could improve access to public services by enabling citizens to interact with government platforms through natural language and voice interfaces.

Challenges

- **Compute Dependence:** Advanced Artificial Intelligence requires substantial computing capacity, and India remains dependent on global supply chains for high-end semiconductors and Graphics Processing Units.
- **Energy Requirements:** Large-scale inference and model training require significant electricity and cooling infrastructure, creating challenges for energy security and environmental sustainability.
- **Data Privacy:** Public datasets must be anonymised and governed by strong privacy safeguards to prevent misuse, surveillance and unauthorised exploitation of personal information.
- **Cybersecurity:** Open Artificial Intelligence systems can create risks involving misinformation, cyberattacks, deepfakes and misuse of powerful models.
- **Quality and Safety:** Open models must be subjected to rigorous evaluation for accuracy, bias, harmful outputs, security vulnerabilities and performance across Indian languages.
- **Fiscal Sustainability:** Permanent subsidies for Artificial Intelligence tokens could become fiscally burdensome. Public support should therefore focus on enabling infrastructure and targeted beneficiaries rather than indefinite universal subsidies.

Way Forward

- **Build Public Digital Rails:** India should focus on creating interoperable standards, identity mechanisms, consent architecture and access infrastructure rather than attempting to control the entire Artificial Intelligence ecosystem.
- **Promote Competition:** Multiple domestic and international providers should be allowed to compete on common infrastructure, preventing excessive concentration and reducing dependence on any single technology company.
- **Invest in Indian Models:** Greater support for Indic language datasets, open-weight models, academic research and domestic Artificial Intelligence startups can strengthen technological sovereignty.
- **Strengthen Responsible Artificial Intelligence:** Privacy, transparency, safety, accountability and human oversight should be incorporated into the infrastructure from the beginning rather than added after deployment.
- **Bridge the Digital Divide:** Affordable Artificial Intelligence must be accompanied by digital literacy, connectivity, local-language interfaces and assisted access so that technological benefits reach rural and marginalised populations.

2. Environmental Cost of Powering Growing Digital and AI-World

Why in the news?

- A University of California, Riverside study highlights the hidden water consumption of Artificial Intelligence systems, as India rapidly expands energy-intensive data-centre infrastructure.

Emerging Water Footprint of Artificial Intelligence

- **Artificial Intelligence Water Consumption:** Research estimates that a typical 20-50 exchange conversation with ChatGPT can consume up to half a litre of water indirectly through data-centre cooling and electricity generation.

- **Growing Global Demand:** The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence applications is increasing demand for computational infrastructure, making water and energy consumption important dimensions of digital sustainability.
- **Data Centres in India:** India's data-centre capacity has increased from around 375 megawatts in 2020 to nearly 1,500 megawatts by 2025 and is projected to reach 13.56 gigawatts by 2031-32.
- **Global Water Footprint:** A United Nations report estimates that data-centre electricity consumption had a water footprint of around 4.5 trillion litres in 2025, potentially rising to **9.3 trillion litres by 2030**.

Why Data Centres Consume Water

- **Cooling Requirements:** High-performance computing generates substantial heat, requiring cooling systems that can consume large quantities of water, particularly in water-intensive cooling configurations.
- **Electricity Generation:** The water footprint extends beyond the data centre because electricity generation itself can require significant quantities of water, particularly in thermal power generation.
- **Artificial Intelligence Workloads:** Artificial Intelligence training and inference require high computational power, increasing electricity demand, heat generation and consequently cooling requirements.

India's Data Centre Expansion

- **Strategic Opportunity:** India is emerging as a major data-centre destination due to its large digital economy, expanding Artificial Intelligence ecosystem, growing internet usage and availability of skilled manpower.
- **State Incentives:** States are offering tax reimbursements, stamp-duty exemptions, energy-related incentives and other concessions to attract large-scale data-centre investments.
- **Resource-Energy Nexus:** Rapid expansion can simultaneously increase demand for electricity, water, land and cooling infrastructure, creating pressure on already stressed urban ecosystems.

Water-Stressed Regions and Data Centres

- **Groundwater Stress:** The Central Ground Water Board's 2024 assessment places India's overall groundwater extraction stage at 60.47%, while 11.1% of assessment units are classified as over-exploited.
- **Hyderabad:** Hyderabad's groundwater stress further demonstrates the risks of locating highly water-intensive infrastructure in regions already facing groundwater depletion.
- **Urban Water Competition:** Concentration of data centres can intensify competition between industrial, domestic and agricultural users, especially in rapidly urbanising regions.

Environmental Concerns

- **Resource Concentration:** Clustering large data centres in one region can place disproportionate pressure on local water sources, electricity networks and surrounding ecosystems.
- **Tanker Dependence:** Reliance on tanker water can shift the burden beyond the immediate project site, potentially encouraging extraction from multiple sources across a city.
- **Transparency Deficit:** Limited disclosure of water consumption makes it difficult for regulators and communities to assess the actual environmental footprint of data-centre projects.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Water-intensive infrastructure in drought-prone regions can increase climate risks because changing rainfall patterns and heat waves may intensify water scarcity.

Economic and Developmental Benefits

- **Digital Infrastructure:** Data centres are essential for cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence, digital payments, e-governance and India's expanding digital economy.
- **Investment and Employment:** Large projects can attract capital, create direct and indirect employment and stimulate supporting sectors such as renewable energy, construction and telecommunications.

- **Strategic Autonomy:** Domestic computing infrastructure can reduce dependence on overseas digital infrastructure and strengthen India's technological sovereignty.
- **Innovation Ecosystem:** Greater computing capacity can support Artificial Intelligence research, startups, scientific research and digital public infrastructure.

Policy Challenges

- **Growth versus Sustainability:** Governments must balance India's ambition to become a global digital hub with the ecological limits of water-stressed regions.
- **Weak Disclosure:** Absence of mandatory reporting of monthly and peak water consumption limits environmental accountability and informed policymaking.
- **Poor Location Planning:** Incentives based predominantly on investment and capacity creation can encourage data centres to locate in regions where water resources are already under severe stress.
- **Externalised Costs:** Subsidies and incentives may attract investments while the environmental costs of groundwater depletion, electricity demand and local pollution are borne by communities.

Way Forward

- **Mandatory Water Disclosure:** Data centres should disclose monthly and peak water consumption, water sources and the proportion of potable, groundwater and reclaimed water used.
- **Water-Stress-Based Permits:** Water-stressed regions should impose stricter environmental permissions, drought-related restrictions and location-specific limits on water-intensive data centres.
- **Reclaimed Water:** Data centres should progressively shift towards treated wastewater and recycled water rather than potable water or groundwater for cooling.
- **Water-Efficient Cooling:** Adoption of advanced cooling technologies, including closed-loop and low-water cooling systems, can reduce freshwater consumption.
- **Renewable Energy:** Greater use of renewable energy can reduce the indirect water footprint associated with electricity generation, while supporting India's climate commitments.
- **Strategic Siting:** Future data centres should be located after assessing water availability, groundwater conditions, electricity capacity, climate vulnerability and cumulative ecological impacts.
- **Green Digital Infrastructure:** Environmental impact assessments should incorporate the complete water-energy-carbon footprint of Artificial Intelligence infrastructure rather than evaluating projects solely on investment and employment.

III. Important Aspects of Governance (RTI, Citizen Charter etc)

1. Modernising the Way of Publishing Laws and Regulations in India

Why in News

- Concerns over fragmented and inaccessible legal publications highlight the need for open, structured and citizen-friendly systems to publish laws, amendments and rules.

Law and Democratic Citizenship

- **Gandhian Lesson:** Mahatma Gandhi translated and published the Transvaal's "Black Act" so ordinary Indians could understand the law affecting them, demonstrating that rights require accessible legal information.
- **Rule of Law:** Citizens can meaningfully exercise rights and duties only when laws are publicly available, understandable and reasonably accessible in their current form.
- **Informed Democracy:** Access to Bills, Acts, rules and regulations enables citizens, civil society and Parliament to scrutinise proposed laws and participate meaningfully in democratic governance.

India's Legal Accessibility Problem

- **Fragmented Legal Information:** Laws, amendments, subordinate legislation, standards, circulars and municipal regulations are dispersed across multiple government websites, gazettes and institutional repositories.
- **Unclear Legal Status:** Citizens may find an amendment but struggle to determine which provisions have actually commenced, making it difficult to establish the law applicable on a particular date.
- **Gazette Dependence:** Government notifications and legislation are predominantly published through gazettes, creating difficulties in searching, linking and systematically understanding the evolution of legal provisions.
- **PDF-Centric Publication:** Portable Document Format files preserve visual appearance but often fail to capture the hierarchical and semantic structure of legislation, limiting machine readability and efficient legal research.
- **Regional Language Challenge:** Proprietary fonts and non-standard digital formats in regional-language gazettes can make documents difficult to search, process and access through modern digital platforms.

Importance of Structured Legal Publishing

- **Semantic Structure:** Markup languages can identify chapters, sections, clauses, amendments and other legal relationships, allowing computers and users to understand the structure of legislation.
- **Version Control:** Structured databases can show how provisions changed over time and determine what the applicable law was on a particular date.
- **Interlinking of Laws:** Principal Acts can be digitally connected with rules, regulations, notifications and amendments, creating an integrated legal information ecosystem.
- **Machine Readability:** Structured legal data enables search engines, legal databases, researchers and technology platforms to process legislation efficiently without relying solely on manually extracted PDF text.

Global Best Practices

- **Akoma Ntoso:** Several countries use Akoma Ntoso, an open standard designed specifically for representing legislative, judicial and legal documents in structured digital formats.
- **United States Legislative Markup:** The United States uses the United States Legislative Markup language for publishing legislation in a structured format, from which HTML and PDF versions can be generated.
- **United Kingdom Model:** The United Kingdom provides legislation through legislation.gov.uk, using structured legislative data and seeking greater alignment with internationally recognised legal markup standards.
- **Open Legal Platforms:** Open-source systems can allow amendments to be incorporated systematically, enabling users to track changes and reconstruct the law applicable at different points in time.

Way Forward

- **National Legal Information Architecture:** India need to develop a unified, authoritative and interoperable digital platform containing Acts, amendments, rules, regulations, notifications and their commencement status.
- **Adoption of Open Standards:** Government legal publishing could progressively adopt internationally compatible open markup standards rather than depending primarily on static PDF documents.
- **Historical Versioning:** Every law needs to have a reliable version history showing amendments, commencement notifications and the legal position applicable on specific dates.
- **Multilingual Accessibility:** Structured legal databases need to support Indian languages through Unicode-compliant standards, enabling citizens to access laws in languages they understand.
- **Citizen-Centric Consultation:** Draft Bills and major subordinate legislation should be made available sufficiently before enactment wherever constitutional, statutory and procedural requirements permit meaningful public consultation.

C. SOCIAL JUSTICE

I. Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections

1. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules

Why in the news?

- A Centre-appointed task force has proposed amendments to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, including inflation-linked relief and stronger rehabilitation mechanisms.

Rule revision The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was last amended in 2018 in response to widespread protests from SC and ST communities 	Recommended amendments: ■ Setting up of special relief and rehabilitation cells in States and U.T.s ■ Increasing relief and rehabilitation amounts in accordance with inflation ■ Fast-tracking FIR and chargesheet procedures ■ Measures for counselling for the victims, their dependents, and those accused	Currently, the relief and rehabilitation amount to be paid to victims of atrocities and their dependents ranges from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh, depending on the seriousness of the crimes under the Act
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Background

- Legal Framework:** The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 seeks to prevent atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, provide special courts and ensure relief and rehabilitation for victims.
- 2018 Amendment:** The Act was amended in 2018 following protests against a Supreme Court ruling that had introduced safeguards concerning arrest and anticipatory bail in atrocity cases.
- Need for Reform:** Persistent social discrimination, land-related disputes, delayed justice and difficulties in accessing compensation necessitate continuous strengthening of the legal and institutional framework.

Task Force Recommendations

- Inflation-Linked Relief:** The task force has proposed increasing relief and rehabilitation amounts to account for inflation, since the existing amounts were fixed in 2016.
- Current Compensation:** Relief currently ranges from ₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh depending on the nature and severity of the offence, injuries and harm suffered by victims and dependants.
- Rehabilitation Cells:** States and Union Territories may establish dedicated relief and rehabilitation cells to ensure coordinated assistance to victims.
- Counselling:** Counselling has been proposed for victims, their dependants and accused persons, potentially addressing trauma, social tensions and rehabilitation needs.

- **Time-Bound Investigation:** FIRs and chargesheets may be required to reach concerned government officials within 24 hours, strengthening administrative monitoring of cases.

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes Recommendations

- **Livelihood Protection:** The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has suggested amendments to protect the livelihoods of tribal communities facing land alienation and prolonged legal disputes.
- **Land Alienation:** Loss of tribal land can undermine livelihood security, cultural identity and economic independence, making protection against unlawful alienation an important tribal welfare concern.
- **Counter FIRs:** The Commission has proposed safeguards against the misuse of counter FIRs against individuals who report atrocity cases, which can discourage victims from approaching law-enforcement agencies.

Importance of the Reforms

- **Victim-Centric Justice:** Inflation-adjusted compensation and institutional rehabilitation can make legal protection more meaningful for victims and their families.
- **Social Justice:** Strong implementation can advance constitutional commitments to equality, dignity and protection against social exploitation.
- **Tribal Livelihood Security:** Protecting communities affected by land alienation can address the economic foundations of tribal vulnerability rather than focusing only on criminal prosecution.
- **Access to Justice:** Preventing intimidation through counter-cases and improving administrative monitoring can encourage victims to report offences.

Implementation Challenges

- **Delayed Justice:** Delays in investigation, prosecution and judicial proceedings can weaken the deterrent effect of the law and prolong victims' distress.
- **Underreporting:** Fear of retaliation, social pressure and economic dependence may discourage victims from registering complaints.
- **Administrative Capacity:** Effective rehabilitation requires dedicated personnel, adequate funding, coordination among departments and timely disbursement of relief.
- **Misuse Concerns:** While preventing false or retaliatory cases is important, safeguards must not become barriers that discourage genuine victims from approaching the police.

Way Forward

- **Index-Linked Compensation:** Relief amounts should be periodically revised through an objective inflation-linked mechanism instead of relying on irregular revisions.
- **Integrated Rehabilitation:** Compensation should be supplemented with housing, livelihood assistance, education, psychological support and legal aid wherever required.
- **Strengthening Special Courts:** Special courts should receive adequate judges, prosecutors and infrastructure to ensure speedy disposal of atrocity cases.
- **Witness Protection:** Effective witness protection mechanisms can reduce intimidation and improve the likelihood of successful prosecution.
- **Land Rights Protection:** Tribal communities facing land alienation should receive timely legal assistance, restoration mechanisms and livelihood protection during prolonged litigation.
- **Data-Based Monitoring:** States should maintain transparent, disaggregated data on FIRs, investigations, compensation, rehabilitation and case outcomes to identify implementation gaps.
- **Balanced Safeguards:** Measures against malicious counter-cases should be designed carefully so that they prevent retaliation without restricting legitimate complaints.

2. Mechanised Sanitation Scheme to Rural India

Why in News?

- The Centre proposes expanding the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem to rural areas amid persistent sanitation-worker deaths and low approval of rehabilitation projects.

NAMASTE Scheme

- **Objective:** The National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE), launched in 2023-24, seeks to eliminate hazardous sewer and septic-tank cleaning and ensure dignity, safety and rehabilitation of sanitation workers.
- **Evolution of Coverage:** Initially focused on sewer and septic tank workers, the scheme was expanded to waste pickers and is now proposed to cover rural areas, drain cleaners and workers in sewage and faecal sludge treatment plants.
- **Proposed Expansion:** The expanded scheme is proposed to receive around ₹498.73 crore between 2026-27 and 2030-31, widening occupational safety and rehabilitation measures beyond urban sanitation systems.

Persistent Sanitation-Related Deaths

- **Human Cost:** The Social Justice Ministry reported 498 deaths during hazardous sewer and septic-tank cleaning between 2019 and June 2026, highlighting continuing risks despite legal and policy interventions.
- **Worker Profiling:** Around 90,915 sewer and septic tank workers and 1.3 lakh waste pickers have been profiled, creating a database for targeted rehabilitation and welfare measures.
- **Mechanisation:** The scheme promotes mechanised cleaning, personal protective equipment, training and emergency response mechanisms to reduce direct human exposure to toxic gases and hazardous waste.

Institutional Concerns

- **National Commission for Scheduled Castes:** The Commission has sought examination of repeated application rejections under the Safai Udyami Yojana and the component supporting Private Sanitation Service Organisations.
- **Implementation Gap:** The contrast between extensive worker identification and limited financial assistance indicates a gap between policy design and last-mile implementation.
- **Access to Credit:** Complex procedures, eligibility requirements, documentation and institutional reluctance may prevent vulnerable sanitation workers from accessing capital subsidies and livelihood opportunities.

Social Justice Dimension

- **Caste and Occupational Vulnerability:** Hazardous sanitation work has historically been associated with caste-based occupational exclusion. Mechanisation must therefore be accompanied by rehabilitation, alternative livelihoods and social dignity.
- **Right to Dignity:** Eliminating hazardous sanitation work is not merely a technological objective but a constitutional commitment linked to equality, dignity and protection from exploitative occupations.
- **Gender Dimension:** Women engaged in waste collection and sanitation-related informal work require targeted livelihood, skill-development and social-security measures under rehabilitation programmes.

Way Forward

- **Transparent Approval Mechanism:** The government should establish clear eligibility criteria, time-bound application processing, reasons for rejection and accessible appeal mechanisms to reduce arbitrary exclusion.
- **Outcome-Based Monitoring:** Monitoring should focus not merely on worker profiling but on mechanisation, subsidy disbursement, alternative employment, income enhancement, workplace safety and elimination of hazardous manual cleaning.

- **Strengthen Local Capacity:** Rural local bodies should receive adequate financial, technical and human-resource support before expanding the scheme, particularly for mechanised equipment and treatment infrastructure.
- **Convergence of Schemes:** NAMASTE should be integrated with skill development, entrepreneurship, social security, health insurance and livelihood programmes to provide comprehensive rehabilitation.

II. Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

1. Indian Youth and Preparation for Government Jobs

Why in the news?

- Student protests over examination irregularities have highlighted a deeper crisis of unemployment, inadequate quality jobs and growing dependence on competitive examinations among educated youth.

Education-Employment Paradox

- **Expansion of Education:** India has significantly expanded access to schooling, higher education, skilling, apprenticeships and vocational training, producing a substantially more educated young population.
- **Mismatch with Labour Market:** Educational expansion has not been matched by sufficient creation of productive, secure and adequately remunerated employment, producing a widening gap between aspirations and opportunities.
- **Quantity versus Quality of Jobs:** The central challenge is not merely employment generation but creation of jobs offering fair wages, social security, decent working conditions and opportunities for career progression.

Examination Crisis to Employment Crisis

- **Rising Aspirations, Limited Opportunities:** India's expansion of education and skilling has raised youth aspirations, but the labour market has failed to create sufficient productive, secure and well-paying employment.
- **Scarcity of Quality Jobs:** Of around 307 million Indians aged 15-29, nearly 127 million are employed, but only about 15 million have regular salaried employment with contracts and social security.
- **The Low-Skilled Youth Trap:** Around 39% of youth have not completed secondary education, while over half possess no qualification beyond Class 10. Most remain employed in informal, low-paid or subsistence work.
- **Low Returns to Education:** A worker completing Class 8 earns roughly ₹12,300 monthly, while secondary schooling adds only about ₹1,000, weakening incentives for continued education, particularly among young women.
- **Gendered Employment Distress:** More than two-fifths of young women are neither employed nor studying, compared with fewer than one-tenth of young men, reflecting low wages, care responsibilities and social constraints.
- **The Graduate Unemployment Paradox:** Graduates face unemployment of around 22.7%, the highest among educational groups, and constitute nearly 56% of unemployed youth despite representing only about 17% of the youth population.
- **Weak Wage Prospects:** Only around 22% of the labour force earns above ₹15,000 monthly, while nearly 55% earns below ₹9,000, making graduate expectations increasingly difficult to reconcile with available employment.

School-to-Work Transition

- **Skill and Career Mismatch:** Many young people have aspirations but lack information about suitable courses, occupations and career pathways, resulting in degrees that do not necessarily translate into employability.
- **Wage-Expectation Gap:** Entry-level wages of ₹10,000-15,000 often fall below graduates' perceived requirements of ₹20,000-25,000, while migration becomes attractive only at significantly higher wages.

- **General Degree Trap:** In the absence of credible vocational and career pathways, students often pursue general degrees and subsequently enter the examination cycle, intensifying competition for limited public employment.

Structural Causes

- **Jobless or Job-Poor Growth:** Economic growth has generated output without creating sufficient numbers of productive and secure jobs, while employment gains since 2019 have partly reflected movement towards low-productivity agriculture.
- **Capital-Intensive Growth:** Greater investment in capital- and technology-intensive sectors, alongside automation, can raise productivity while limiting the employment intensity of economic expansion.
- **Human Capital Investment Gap:** India spends around 2.7% of Gross Domestic Product on education and about 1.9% on health, below the national aspirations of 6% and 2.5% respectively.
- **Infrastructure-Human Capital Imbalance:** Public investment has expanded substantially in physical infrastructure, but greater emphasis on health, education and human capabilities is necessary to create a productive and adaptable workforce.

Way Forward

- **Promote Labour-Intensive Manufacturing:** India should strengthen textiles, footwear, food processing, tourism, construction and other labour-intensive sectors capable of absorbing large numbers of semi-skilled and moderately skilled workers.
- **Strengthen Apprenticeships:** Industry-linked apprenticeships, internships and dual vocational education should provide young people with practical experience and smoother transitions from classrooms to workplaces.
- **Improve Career Guidance:** Schools, colleges and skill institutions should provide reliable information on occupations, wages, qualifications, migration opportunities and career progression.
- **Raise Quality of Informal Work:** Formalisation should be accompanied by social security, occupational safety, minimum wages, portable benefits and access to affordable credit for informal and self-employed workers.
- **Expand Female Employment:** Affordable childcare, safe transport, flexible work arrangements, skill programmes and higher-productivity employment can improve women's participation in the labour market.
- **Reorient Public Investment:** Greater investment in education, healthcare and human capital can improve productivity while creating employment directly through labour-intensive public services.
- **Reform Recruitment Systems:** Transparent examinations, reliable testing infrastructure, timely recruitment calendars and strict accountability for examination irregularities are necessary to restore trust in public recruitment.

2. PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme

Why in News?

- The Pradhan Mantri Vidyalaxmi Scheme is expanding digital, collateral-free education finance, strengthening equitable access to quality higher education for meritorious students.



PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme At a Glance

PM-VIDYALAXMI
Inspiring Learning, Achieving Goals

About The Loan

- Provides collateral-free and guarantor-free education loans
- Loans are available for both degree and diploma programmes
- No cap on loan amount or income category for availing the loan

Loan covers:

- Tuition fees
- Hostel charges
- Examination fees
- Books & equipment
- Other approved academic expenses

Interest rate is capped at the individual bank's EBLR + 0.5%

Interest Subvention

3% interest subvention on loans up to ₹10 lakh for students whose family's annual income is up to ₹8 lakh.

Credit Guarantee

75% government credit guarantee for loans up to ₹7.5 lakh

Eligibility

- Students admitted to top educational institutions based on their own merit.
- Institutions are shortlisted based on their NIRF rankings.

Loan Repayment Period

Up to 15 years, excluding the course period + 1-year moratorium

Why Is It Beneficial?

- Meritorious students get an opportunity to pursue higher education from top institutions.
- Ensures that financial constraints do not hinder the prospects of meritorious students from acquiring quality education.
- Advances equity and inclusivity in Higher Education.

Pradhan Mantri Vidyalaxmi Scheme

- **Objective:** The Pradhan Mantri Vidyalaxmi Scheme aims to ensure that financial constraints do not prevent meritorious students from accessing quality higher education in designated institutions.
- **Policy Foundation:** Approved by the Union Cabinet in November 2024, the scheme implements the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on financial assistance for meritorious students pursuing higher education.
- **Link with Sustainable Development Goal 4:** The scheme advances Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Need for the Scheme

- **Expansion of Higher Education:** India's Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education increased from 23.7% in 2014-15 to 30% in 2023-24, reflecting expanding demand for higher education.

- **Persistent Financial Barriers:** Despite rising enrolment, high fees and education-related expenses can prevent economically weaker students from accessing premier institutions, even when they secure admission through merit.
- **Unequal Access to Credit:** Conventional education loans may require collateral, guarantees or involve high interest costs, creating additional barriers for students from financially constrained households.

Key Features

- **Collateral-Free Loans:** Students admitted on merit to designated Quality Higher Educational Institutions can obtain education loans without collateral or third-party guarantees.
- **Credit Guarantee:** The Government provides a 75% credit guarantee for education loans up to ₹7.5 lakh, reducing lending risks for participating financial institutions.
- **Interest Rate Cap:** Interest rates are capped at the bank's Externally Benchmarked Lending Rate plus 0.5%, making loans more affordable than comparable education loans.
- **Interest Subvention:** Students with annual family income up to ₹8 lakh can receive 3% interest subvention on loans up to ₹10 lakh during the moratorium period.
- **Additional Interest Support:** Students with annual family income up to ₹4.5 lakh can receive full interest subsidy during the moratorium period under the Central Sector Interest Subsidy Scheme for eligible technical and professional courses.
- **Repayment Flexibility:** Education loans can be repaid over a period of up to 15 years, excluding the moratorium period comprising the course duration plus one year.

Significance

- **Educational Equity:** By reducing upfront financial barriers, the scheme can enable capable students from economically weaker families to access institutions otherwise beyond their financial reach.
- **Human Capital Formation:** Greater access to quality higher education can improve skills, productivity, employability and the availability of future-ready human capital.
- **Social Mobility:** Affordable education finance can facilitate upward socioeconomic mobility by enabling first-generation learners to obtain professional and higher-level qualifications.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Collateral-free credit and digital processing can bring students without substantial family assets into formal financial systems.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Improved access to higher education can strengthen women's skills, employment prospects, economic independence and long-term social participation.

Challenges

- **Limited Institutional Coverage:** Restricting benefits to designated institutions may leave students pursuing quality education in numerous institutions outside the eligible list without equivalent support.
- **Credit-Indebtedness Risk:** Education loans remain debt obligations. Weak employment outcomes or low post-graduation wages could create repayment difficulties for beneficiaries.
- **Awareness Gap:** Students from disadvantaged households may lack adequate information about eligibility, application procedures, interest subvention and repayment conditions.
- **Digital Divide:** Dependence on digital applications and online grievance mechanisms may disadvantage students with limited internet access, digital literacy or banking familiarity.
- **Quality versus Access:** Financial support alone cannot guarantee equitable education unless the quality, affordability and capacity of higher education institutions also improve.

Way Forward

- **Expand Quality Institutions:** Increasing the number of high-quality higher education institutions and strengthening accreditation can broaden the pool of students benefiting from affordable educational finance.
- **Strengthen Career Linkages:** Education loans should be complemented with internships, apprenticeships, industry linkages and career counselling to improve graduate employability and repayment capacity.
- **Improve Awareness:** Colleges should establish dedicated financial-aid facilitation centres to help students understand loans, subsidies, eligibility requirements and repayment obligations.
- **Ensure Digital Inclusion:** Assisted application centres and offline support mechanisms should complement the digital portal to ensure that technology does not become a new barrier.
- **Monitor Outcomes:** The Government should regularly evaluate enrolment, completion, employment, repayment and socioeconomic outcomes to assess whether the scheme is genuinely improving educational mobility.

3. Government Schools Closure

Why in News?

- A recent NITI Aayog report highlighted the closure of nearly 94,000 government schools over a decade, raising concerns over access, equity and implementation of the Right to Education.

Government School Closures: Emerging Trend

- **Scale of Decline:** Nearly 94,000 government schools reportedly closed over the past decade, while government-school enrolment declined by around 2.26 crore. Their share of total enrolment fell from 71% in 2005 to 49.24% in 2024-25.
- **Rationalisation:** States are increasingly merging or closing schools with low enrolment, citing administrative efficiency, demographic changes and rationalisation under the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.
- **Beyond Demography:** School closures cannot be attributed solely to declining fertility, migration or urbanisation, as administrative rationalisation can itself reduce accessibility and subsequently accelerate withdrawal from government schools.
- **Majorly Affected States:** Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir have witnessed substantial reductions in government-school numbers under rationalisation and consolidation measures.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Right to Education:** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, operationalised Article 21A and guarantees free and compulsory education for children between six and fourteen years.
- **Neighbourhood School:** The Right to Education framework seeks to ensure access to schooling within a reasonable neighbourhood, making physical accessibility an important component of educational inclusion.
- **Concurrent Responsibility:** Education is a subject in the Concurrent List, meaning both the Union and State governments have legislative and policy responsibilities.
- **National Education Policy:** NEP 2020 supports school rationalisation and school complexes for improving resource utilisation, but such consolidation should not undermine neighbourhood access.

Impact on Educational Equity

- **Poor Households:** Government schools disproportionately serve economically vulnerable households, making closures particularly consequential for families with limited capacity to shift children to private institutions.
- **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes:** Marginalised social groups are more dependent on affordable and geographically accessible public education, increasing the equity consequences of school consolidation.
- **Girls' Education:** Greater distance to schools can disproportionately affect girls because safety concerns, household responsibilities and social norms may discourage families from sending them to distant institutions.

- **Migration-Affected Children:** Children of migrant workers face repeated interruptions in schooling, and school closures can further weaken continuity and access.
- **Quality of Education:** Consolidation can increase classroom size, travel distances and teacher workload, potentially undermining personalised learning and compliance with staffing norms.

Way Forward

- **Evidence-Based Rationalisation:** School closure should be preceded by transparent social-impact assessments covering distance, transport availability, enrolment trends, teacher availability and the socioeconomic profile of affected children.
- **Protect Neighbourhood Access:** Consolidation should not force children, particularly girls and children from vulnerable communities, to travel unreasonable distances to access elementary education.
- **Strengthen School Complexes:** Schools with low enrolment can share teachers, laboratories, libraries, sports facilities and digital infrastructure through school complexes without necessarily eliminating neighbourhood schools.
- **Improve Government Schools:** Better infrastructure, adequate teachers, foundational learning, digital resources and vocational exposure can restore parental confidence in public education.
- **Strengthen School Management Committees:** Local communities should have meaningful participation in decisions concerning school mergers, closures, transport arrangements and infrastructure development.
- **Migration-Sensitive Education:** Portable student records, migrant support centres, bridge courses and flexible admission mechanisms can prevent children from falling outside the formal education system.
- **Accountability Mechanism:** The Union and States should establish transparent indicators to monitor school closures, enrolment transitions, dropout rates and the educational consequences of rationalisation.

III. Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger

1. National Food Security Framework

Why in the news?

- Estimates from the latest household consumption survey indicate improved affordability of recommended diets, but millions remain unable to afford adequate and healthy nutrition.

Changing Nature of Food Security

- **Improved Diet Affordability:** The share of households unable to afford the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition recommended diet declined from about 52% in 2011-12 to nearly 25% in 2023-24.
- **Persistent Vulnerability:** Despite progress, around one-fourth of rural and one-fifth of urban households still struggle to afford an adequate healthy diet, showing that food security remains incomplete.
- **Beyond Hunger:** Poverty, hunger and inability to afford a healthy diet overlap but are distinct challenges, requiring food-security policies to increasingly focus on nutrition quality.

Antyodaya Anna Yojana Reform

- **Existing Entitlement:** Priority Households receive 5 kg of foodgrains per person monthly, while Antyodaya Anna Yojana households receive a flat 35 kg per household.
- **Proposed Formula:** The draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026 proposes 7 kg per person for Antyodaya households, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household.
- **Household-Size Inequity:** Under the existing system, larger Antyodaya households receive progressively less grain per person, with an eight-member household receiving only about 4.4 kg per person.

- **Potential Losses:** The proposed formula could reduce entitlements for one-to-four-member Antyodaya households by 20% to 80%, while providing no additional grain to households with five or more members.
- **No-Loss Principle:** Existing 35 kg monthly entitlement should be protected through an explicit safeguard so that entitlement reform does not unintentionally reduce support to vulnerable households.

Coverage Challenge

- **Outdated Beneficiary Ceiling:** The National Food Security Act, 2013 permits coverage of up to 75% of the rural and 50% of the urban population, but the current beneficiary ceiling remains based on Census 2011.
- **Population Gap:** Around 80 crore people currently receive free foodgrains, while the estimated 2025 population of 146.4 crore means the existing ceiling covers only about 55.6%.
- **Census 2027:** The beneficiary ceiling should be reassessed using updated population data after the Census 2027 figures become available.
- **Transparent Inclusion:** Updated deprivation indicators, accessible inclusion mechanisms and effective appeal procedures are necessary to prevent deserving households from remaining outside the food-security net.

Strengthening the Public Distribution System

- **Expanded Food Basket:** The Public Distribution System should gradually support access to pulses and other nutritious foods without reducing existing cereal entitlements.
- **Local Procurement:** Procurement policies should support pulse, millet and oilseed farmers while aligning public procurement with regional nutritional requirements.
- **Complementary Programmes:** The Public Distribution System should work alongside Anganwadi services and Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman to address nutritional requirements across different age groups.
- **School Nutrition:** School meals can incorporate eggs, milk or locally acceptable alternatives where feasible, improving protein and micronutrient intake among children.
- **Food Subsidy:** The substantial food-subsidy allocation under the Union Budget requires transparent costing when additional nutritional components are introduced.

Technology and Last-Mile Delivery

- **Digitised Distribution:** By the end of 2025, almost all fair price shops had electronic point-of-sale devices, strengthening monitoring and transaction transparency.
- **One Nation One Ration Card:** The One Nation One Ration Card system has substantially improved portability of food entitlements, benefiting migrant workers and mobile households.
- **Exclusion Risks:** Digital authentication should not become a barrier for elderly persons, persons with disabilities or those facing connectivity and biometric difficulties.
- **Assisted Access:** Offline alternatives, doorstep assistance and clear safeguards against denial of food due to authentication failure are essential.

Integrating Food and Health Systems

- **Nutrition Information:** Fair price shops can provide simple multilingual information on dietary diversity, appropriate cereal consumption and healthier choices.
- **Health Referrals:** Trained frontline workers can connect beneficiaries voluntarily with screening and treatment services for diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases.
- **Existing Infrastructure:** Ayushman Arogya Mandirs provide an extensive primary-health platform that can support stronger linkages between nutrition and non-communicable disease prevention.
- **Confidentiality:** Health counselling and screening must remain voluntary and confidential and should never become a condition for receiving food entitlements.

Way Forward

- **Protect Existing Entitlements:** Any reform of Antyodaya Anna Yojana should ensure that no household receives less than its existing 35 kg monthly entitlement merely because of a change in the calculation formula.
- **Review the Ceiling:** The adequacy of the 35 kg ceiling should periodically be assessed for larger households and households with high dependency or nutritional needs.
- **Separate Nutrition Financing:** Dietary diversification should receive additional and separately budgeted resources rather than being financed by reducing cereal entitlements.
- **Pilot-Based Reform:** States should conduct phased pilots to assess dietary diversity, anaemia, glycaemic risk, household expenditure, wastage, exclusion and supply-chain feasibility.
- **Convergence:** Food, nutrition, agriculture and health policies should operate through an integrated framework rather than treating foodgrain distribution as the sole instrument of food security.

D. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

I. India and its Neighborhood- Relations

1. Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity (SHANTI)

Why in the news?

- India has proposed SHANTI as a normative maritime security framework, with the Bay of Bengal identified as a potential laboratory for trust-based regional cooperation.

SHANTI: A New Maritime Security Framework

- **Meaning and Objective:** SHANTI stands for Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity. It seeks to strengthen maritime cooperation through shared norms, mutual trust and institutional integrity.
- **Evolution of Maritime Outreach:** SHANTI builds upon Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), articulated in 2015, and Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR), announced in 2025.
- **From Vision to Method:** SAGAR provided the broad vision of equitable development, while MAHASAGAR expanded its geographical and strategic scope. SHANTI seeks to provide the normative framework through which these objectives can be operationalised.
- **From Competition to Cooperation:** The framework emphasises demand-driven cooperation, non-prescriptive institution-building and long-term resilience rather than dominance, strategic competition and episodic crisis management.

Strategic Importance of the Bay of Bengal

- **Historical Connectivity:** The Bay of Bengal historically connected South and Southeast Asia through trade, cultural exchanges, religious movements and the circulation of ideas.
- **Gateway to Southeast Asia:** The Bay connects India's Act East policy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and provides access towards the strategically important Malacca Strait.
- **Global Trade Routes:** It links the eastern Indian Ocean with major international trade and energy routes, making its stability important for regional and global economic security.
- **Strategic Competition:** China's dependence on the Malacca Strait and its expanding presence through ports and infrastructure have increased strategic competition in the Bay of Bengal and the wider Indo-Pacific.

Non-Traditional Maritime Threats

- **Climate-Induced Disasters:** Cyclones, sea-level rise, coastal erosion and extreme weather events frequently affect Bay of Bengal littoral states and require coordinated regional disaster preparedness.
- **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing:** Unsustainable and illegal fishing threatens marine ecosystems, food security and the livelihoods of coastal communities, requiring information-sharing and coordinated maritime enforcement.
- **Cyber Vulnerabilities:** Increasing digitalisation of ports, shipping and maritime infrastructure creates new cyber risks that cannot be effectively addressed through isolated national responses.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** Disruptions to shipping routes, ports, undersea cables and energy infrastructure can have consequences across multiple countries because maritime systems are deeply interconnected.

SHANTI and India's Regional Role

- **Preferred Security Partner:** SHANTI seeks to strengthen India's role as a preferred security partner and first responder while avoiding perceptions of regional dominance.
- **Regional Stewardship:** India's geographical position and capabilities provide it with a natural convening role, but sustainable leadership requires trust-based and rules-based cooperation.
- **Non-Prescriptive Institution-Building:** Instead of imposing institutions, India can facilitate mechanisms designed around the needs and priorities identified collectively by Bay of Bengal states.
- **Resilience-Centred Security:** The framework broadens maritime security from military deterrence to disaster resilience, environmental protection, economic security and governance of shared maritime spaces.

Challenges

- **Geopolitical Rivalry:** Competition among major powers, particularly growing Chinese strategic presence, could complicate attempts to establish an inclusive regional security architecture.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Smaller littoral states may lack adequate naval, coast guard, surveillance, disaster-response and technological capabilities to participate equally in regional mechanisms.
- **Institutional Overlap:** Multiple regional organisations and bilateral arrangements can create duplication unless their roles, information-sharing mechanisms and operational responsibilities are clearly coordinated.
- **Trust Deficit:** Historical sensitivities, sovereignty concerns and differing strategic priorities can limit intelligence-sharing and deeper maritime cooperation.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Increasing intensity of extreme weather events may place additional pressure on already limited regional disaster-management capacities.

Way Forward

- **Common Maritime Protocols:** Bay of Bengal states should develop common protocols for disaster response, maritime law enforcement, environmental emergencies and information-sharing.
- **Strengthen Maritime Domain Awareness:** Integrated surveillance, satellite-based monitoring, Automatic Identification System data and information-sharing centres can improve awareness of activities across shared maritime spaces.
- **Joint Capacity Building:** India and other capable regional states should support training, equipment, search-and-rescue capabilities and disaster-response preparedness of smaller littoral countries.
- **Blue Economy Cooperation:** Sustainable fisheries, marine biotechnology, coastal tourism and renewable ocean energy should be developed while protecting marine ecosystems and coastal communities.
- **Protect Critical Infrastructure:** Regional cooperation should extend to ports, undersea communication cables, energy infrastructure and digitally connected maritime systems.

2. Mecca Joint Defence Agreement

Why in News?

- Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan have signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement amid continuing instability in West Asia and disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea.

Changing Security Environment

- **Regional Volatility:** Although active hostilities may temporarily decline, continuing tensions involving Iran, Israel, the Houthis and regional powers keep West Asia strategically unstable.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** Disruption of the Strait of Hormuz threatens a major global energy artery and can affect oil supplies, shipping costs and energy security for import-dependent economies such as India.
- **Bab-el-Mandeb:** Houthi attacks around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait have disrupted Red Sea shipping, affecting the movement of Saudi and Russian crude towards Asian markets.

Mecca Joint Defence Agreement

- **Collective Defence Principle:** The agreement states that an armed attack against any of the three signatories will be regarded as an attack against all, indicating an intent towards collective security.
- **Unclear Commitments:** The agreement does not clearly specify the military obligations, geographical scope or circumstances under which collective defence would be activated.
- **Question of Threat Perception:** The agreement raises uncertainty because Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan do not share identical perceptions of their principal security threats.

Comparison with NATO

- **Article 5:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's Article 5 establishes collective defence, but its effectiveness ultimately depends on shared threat perceptions and political willingness rather than treaty language alone.
- **Different Strategic Priorities:** Saudi Arabia is primarily concerned with regional security and Iran, Turkey focuses strongly on Syria and Israel, while Pakistan remains concerned with India and Afghanistan.
- **Limits of an Islamic NATO:** Divergent strategic interests, different regional priorities and the absence of a clearly defined common adversary make the emergence of an Islamic equivalent of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation unlikely.

Pakistan's Strategic Calculations

- **Diplomatic Leverage:** The agreement provides Pakistan with greater diplomatic visibility and strategic relevance at a time when it faces economic pressures and internal security challenges.
- **Military Commitments:** Pakistan has previously deployed military personnel in Saudi Arabia, raising questions about the extent to which the new agreement will translate into actual combat commitments.
- **Balancing Relations:** Pakistan must balance its relationship with Saudi Arabia against its ties with Iran and its own security priorities involving India and Afghanistan.

Implications for India

- **Energy Security:** India is heavily dependent on imported hydrocarbons, making uninterrupted access through Hormuz and other maritime routes essential for economic stability.
- **Strategic Partnership with Saudi Arabia:** India has developed strong economic, energy and diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, requiring continued engagement with Riyadh amid changing regional alignments.
- **Right of Self-Defence:** India must retain its sovereign right to respond to attacks while clearly communicating its security concerns to partners in the Gulf region.

- **Maritime Security:** India should strengthen maritime surveillance, naval capabilities and diversified energy supply chains to reduce vulnerability to disruptions in critical sea lanes.

Way Forward for West Asia

- **Mainstreaming Iran:** A sustainable regional security framework requires Iran's integration into regional diplomacy rather than its permanent exclusion from the West Asian security architecture.
- **Reviving Diplomacy:** Dialogue on nuclear issues, sanctions, regional security and economic cooperation can reduce incentives for military confrontation and create shared stakes in stability.
- **Energy Interdependence:** Stable energy markets can provide economic incentives to Iran and Gulf states to maintain open waterways and avoid prolonged confrontation.
- **Avoiding Zero-Sum Alliances:** Regional security should move beyond rigid Sunni-Shia or pro-Israel/anti-Israel blocs towards issue-based cooperation involving all major regional stakeholders.
- **Multilateral Security Framework:** Gulf states, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and other stakeholders should pursue mechanisms for maritime security, conflict prevention, energy cooperation and crisis communication.

II. India & World

1. Should the Commonwealth Games be Scrapped?

Why in News?

- The recently concluded Glasgow Commonwealth Games revived concerns over the sustainability of traditional multisport events, amid rising hosting costs, reduced participation and exclusion of major disciplines.

Significance of Commonwealth Games

- **Global Sporting Platform:** The Commonwealth Games provide athletes with an important international competition between the Olympics, World Championships and continental events, depending on the sport.
- **Preparation for Major Events:** The Games allow athletes to experience international pressure, media interaction, competition environments and athlete villages, helping them prepare for tougher events.
- **India's Sporting Importance:** India has historically performed strongly at the Commonwealth Games, making the event significant for developing sporting confidence, identifying talent and strengthening India's international sporting presence.
- **Development of Sports:** Events such as shooting, wrestling, badminton and athletics gain visibility through the Games, helping generate public interest, sponsorship and opportunities for athletes.

Challenges Facing Commonwealth Games

- **Rising Hosting Costs:** Large multisport events require substantial expenditure on infrastructure, accommodation, security and logistics, discouraging countries from bidding to host them.
- **Declining Participation:** Host cities are increasingly imposing restrictions on athlete numbers and sports, making it difficult for qualified athletes to participate despite meeting performance standards.
- **Exclusion of Sports:** Shooting and other disciplines have been removed from recent editions, reducing opportunities for athletes and weakening the sporting diversity that traditionally defined the Commonwealth Games.
- **Commercial Viability:** Sports with lower television audiences or limited spectator interest face exclusion as organisers attempt to reduce costs and make events commercially sustainable.
- **Changing Global Perceptions:** Environmental concerns, infrastructure costs and examples of financial stress after major sporting events have increased scrutiny of the traditional model of hosting multisport competitions.

Impact on Athletes

- **Reduced Opportunities:** Restrictions on squad sizes can prevent even qualified athletes from participating, creating uncertainty for competitors and making selection decisions increasingly difficult for national federations.
- **Loss of Competitive Exposure:** Removing sports from major events reduces opportunities to compete under pressure and gain experience before more demanding events such as the Asian Games, World Championships and Olympics.
- **Reduced Visibility:** Exclusion from major competitions can reduce broadcasting, sponsorship and public attention, particularly for sports that already receive limited media coverage.

India's Opportunity

- **2030 Commonwealth Games:** Hosting the 2030 Games can provide India with an opportunity to strengthen sporting infrastructure, organisational capabilities and athlete development systems.
- **Olympic Preparation:** The 2030 Games could serve as a stepping stone towards India's ambition of hosting the 2036 Olympic Games by providing experience in managing large international sporting events.
- **Infrastructure Legacy:** Existing and new sporting infrastructure can be utilised for athlete training, domestic competitions and future international events, reducing the risk of underutilised facilities.
- **Sports Economy:** Successful hosting can stimulate sports tourism, broadcasting, sponsorship, sports technology, employment and fan engagement, strengthening India's broader sports ecosystem.

Way Forward

- **Sustainable Hosting:** The Commonwealth Games Federation should move away from expensive one-city hosting models and adopt flexible, financially sustainable and environmentally responsible arrangements.
- **Sporting Continuity:** Core disciplines should not be removed solely because individual hosts lack infrastructure; alternative countries should be allowed to host specific events.
- **Athlete-Centric Approach:** Participation rules should prioritise qualified athletes and sporting merit rather than excessive squad restrictions that prevent deserving competitors from representing their countries.
- **Fan Engagement:** Digital platforms, innovative broadcasting, affordable ticketing and interactive experiences can increase spectator interest in less commercially popular sports.
- **Long-Term Planning:** India should integrate the Commonwealth Games with a broader sporting strategy involving grassroots talent identification, athlete development, coaching, sports science and high-performance infrastructure.

2. India and Japan Maritime Security Pact

Why in News?

- India and Japan signed a Maritime Security Cooperation arrangement to strengthen naval coordination, maritime domain awareness, logistics, defence technology and Indo-Pacific security amid heightened regional tensions.

India-Japan Maritime Security Cooperation

- **New Maritime Security Arrangement:** India and Japan signed a Memorandum of Arrangement to strengthen cooperation between the Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in maritime security.
- **Maritime Domain Awareness:** Cooperation will cover information sharing, maritime domain awareness, search and rescue, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, improving the ability to monitor maritime developments.
- **Protection of Sea Lines of Communication:** Reciprocal naval visits, joint exercises, personnel exchanges and logistical support will strengthen protection of vital sea routes essential for energy and trade security.
- **Logistics and Ship Repair:** India and Japan will facilitate reciprocal access to ports, maintenance and repair facilities, enhancing naval endurance and operational reach across the Indo-Pacific.

Defence Industrial Cooperation

- **Shipbuilding and Design:** India and Japan will explore joint development in naval shipbuilding and design by combining Japanese technological expertise with India's manufacturing and production capabilities.
- **Make in India:** Japan's participation in India's shipbuilding ecosystem can strengthen domestic defence manufacturing, technology absorption, skilled employment and indigenous naval production under the Make in India framework.
- **UNICORN System:** The shipborne UNICORN integrated communications antenna system has emerged as a symbol of expanding defence-equipment cooperation between India and Japan.
- **Defence Technology Cooperation:** India's Defence Research and Development Organisation and Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency will deepen cooperation in advanced defence technologies.

Institutional Mechanisms

- **Defence Industry Forum:** A Defence Industry Forum will provide an institutional platform for greater collaboration between defence industries, technology developers and government agencies.
- **Joint Working Group:** A Director-General/Joint Secretary-level Working Group will coordinate cooperation across operational, intelligence, equipment, technology and industrial domains.
- **2+2 Dialogue:** India and Japan will accelerate discussions for the fourth Foreign and Defence Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue, strengthening strategic coordination at the political and defence levels.

Strategic Significance for India

- **Free and Open Indo-Pacific:** Deeper maritime cooperation supports India and Japan's shared objective of maintaining a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- **Securing Maritime Trade:** Enhanced cooperation helps safeguard Sea Lines of Communication through which India's energy supplies and international trade largely move.
- **Countering Maritime Uncertainty:** Growing Chinese naval presence and strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific make stronger partnerships with capable maritime powers increasingly important for India.
- **Technology and Capability Enhancement:** Japanese expertise in advanced maritime technologies, combined with India's industrial capacity, can accelerate indigenous defence capabilities and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers.

Challenges Ahead

- **Strategic Autonomy:** India must deepen cooperation with Japan without allowing strategic partnerships to compromise its independent decision-making and multi-alignment policy.
- **Technology Transfer:** Defence-industrial cooperation should move beyond equipment procurement towards meaningful technology transfer, joint research, co-development and domestic manufacturing.
- **Operational Interoperability:** Differences in military doctrines, procurement systems and institutional procedures may require sustained exercises, information-sharing mechanisms and standardisation.

Way Forward

- **Institutionalise Maritime Cooperation:** Regular information exchange, coordinated patrol-related activities, naval exercises and operational dialogues should be institutionalised for sustained maritime preparedness.
- **Build Defence Industrial Ecosystems:** India should leverage Japanese technology and investment to develop indigenous shipbuilding, repair, communications, unmanned systems and maritime surveillance capabilities.
- **Strengthen Indo-Pacific Partnerships:** India-Japan cooperation should complement wider partnerships with Australia, ASEAN members and other like-minded countries while remaining focused on regional stability rather than bloc politics.

3. India and Brazil Relations

Why in News?

- India and Brazil signed a Memorandum of Understanding on telecommunications and Information and Communication Technologies to deepen cooperation in digital infrastructure and emerging technologies.

Areas of Technological Cooperation

- Artificial Intelligence and Next-Generation Networks:** Cooperation will cover Artificial Intelligence, fifth-generation and sixth-generation telecommunications technologies, enabling both countries to collaborate on emerging digital technologies.
- Open Radio Access Network:** Cooperation in Open Radio Access Network can promote interoperable telecommunications infrastructure, encourage competition among equipment providers and potentially reduce network deployment costs.
- Internet of Things:** Collaboration in Internet of Things technologies can support smart infrastructure, industrial automation, agriculture, healthcare and urban service delivery.
- Direct-to-Device Connectivity:** Cooperation in Direct-to-Device connectivity can help extend communication services to remote regions by enabling compatible devices to connect directly with satellite networks.
- Satellite-Based Connectivity:** Low Earth Orbit satellites and Non-Terrestrial Networks will provide opportunities to improve connectivity in geographically difficult and underserved regions.

Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity

- Optical Fibre and Submarine Cables:** Cooperation in optical fibre networks and submarine cable infrastructure can strengthen international data connectivity and improve the resilience of digital communication systems.
- Universal Connectivity:** The partnership seeks to promote universal and meaningful connectivity, particularly by addressing digital access gaps affecting rural, remote and underserved populations.
- Digital Inclusion:** Cooperation on digital inclusion can help reduce disparities arising from income, geography, gender, digital literacy and access to technological infrastructure.

Cybersecurity and Digital Governance

- Cybersecurity:** Information exchange and cooperation in cybersecurity can strengthen national capacities to prevent, detect and respond to cyber threats targeting critical digital infrastructure.
- Consumer Protection:** Cooperation on consumer protection can promote safer digital services, greater transparency and stronger safeguards for users in rapidly expanding digital markets.
- Spectrum Management:** Collaboration in spectrum and satellite/orbit management can improve efficient allocation of scarce communication resources and facilitate coordination in emerging satellite-based services.
- Digital Public Infrastructure:** India can share its experience with Digital Public Infrastructure, while Brazil can contribute perspectives from its own digital governance and connectivity initiatives.

Strategic Significance for India

- Global South Cooperation:** India-Brazil technological cooperation strengthens South-South collaboration and enables developing economies to shape global norms relating to emerging digital technologies.
- BRICS Cooperation:** The agreement complements broader BRICS efforts to promote technological cooperation, digital inclusion and greater participation of emerging economies in global technology governance.
- Technology Diplomacy:** Partnerships with Brazil can strengthen India's technological diplomacy and create opportunities for joint innovation, standards development and international cooperation.
- Capacity Building:** Exchange of expertise, experiences and best practices can strengthen institutional and human-resource capabilities in telecommunications and emerging technologies.



**R.C.REDDY
IAS STUDY CIRCLE**

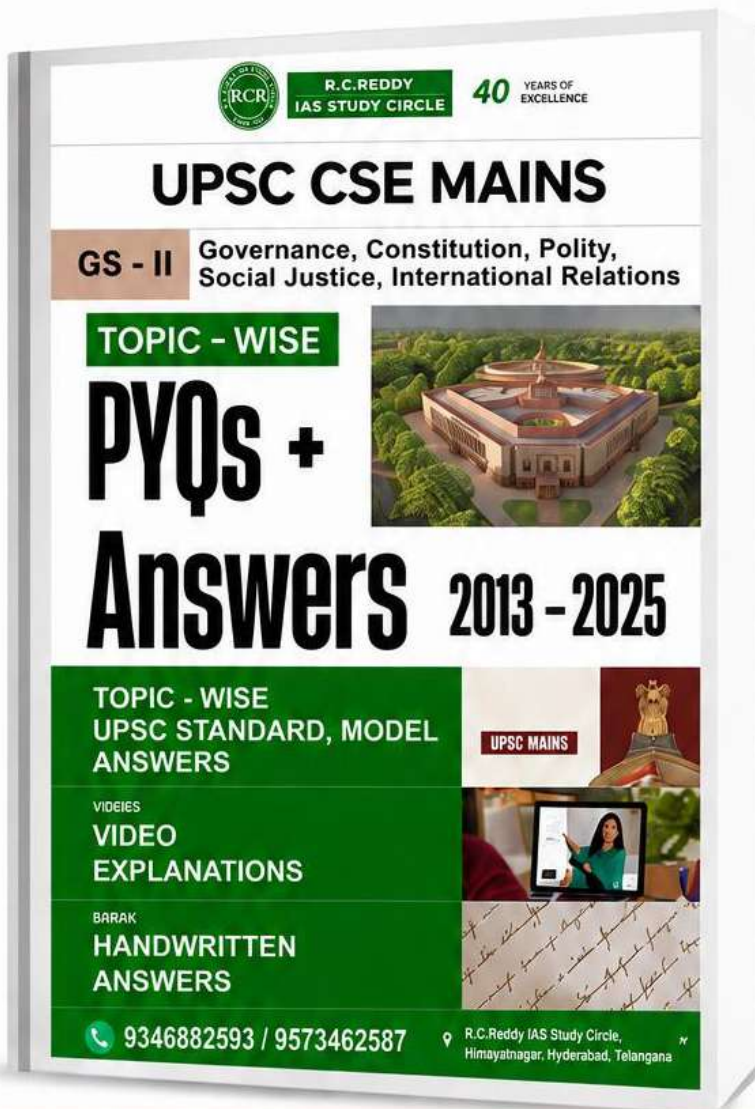
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GENERAL STUDIES - 3

A. INDIAN ECONOMY

I. Growth and Development, employment

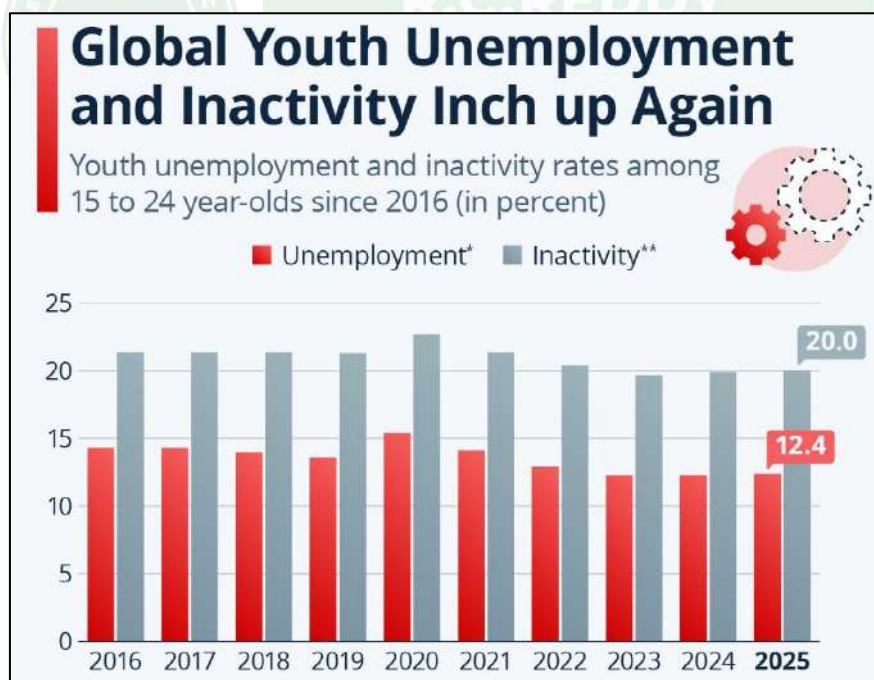
1. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE QUEST FOR QUALITY JOBS

Why in news?

- Recently, concerns over **exam integrity and rising youth unemployment** have drawn attention towards the mismatch between educational aspirations and the employment opportunities.

Why Do Youth Prefer Government Jobs?

- Scarcity of Secure Jobs:** Out of 141 million youth in the labour force, only 15 million hold formal salaried positions with contracts and social security.
- Graduate Unemployment:** Graduates face 22.7% unemployment, three times higher than non-school completers; only 17 of 100 graduates secure salaried work.
- Social Mobility:** Exams like UPSC, SSC, Railways are seen as transparent pathways for marginalized groups, bypassing informal private hiring networks.
- Wage Gap:** Private entry-level jobs often pay ₹10,000-15,000, far below subsistence needs, pushing youth towards prolonged exam preparation.



Structural Economic Flaws

- Jobless Growth:** GDP growth has been capital-intensive, with automation reducing headcount.
- Weak Manufacturing:** Sector contributes only 13% to GDP, failing to absorb middle-educated workforce.
- Low Human Capital Investment:** India spends 2.7% of GDP on education and 1.9% on health, below targets.
- Skill Mismatch:** Degrees expand without industry alignment; nearly 50% of graduates remain unemployable without retraining.

Implications of Competitive Exam Culture

- **Demographic Dividend Loss:** Millions spend 3-6 years preparing, delaying workforce entry.
- **Skill Underutilisation:** Highly qualified candidates compete for lower-level posts.
- **Human Capital Erosion:** Rote exam focus leaves aspirants with career gaps and poor employability.
- **Entrepreneurship Suppression:** Preference for secure jobs diverts talent from start-ups and innovation.
- **Coaching Economy:** Multi-billion industry drains household resources from education and healthcare.
- **Mental Health Crisis:** Stress, repeated failures, and suicides rising in coaching hubs.
- **Gender Disparities:** Social norms and care responsibilities restrict women's participation.

Government Initiatives

- **Skill India, PMKVY 4.0 & NAPS:** Focus on **industry-aligned vocational training, apprenticeships and digital skills**, helping youth become job-ready and reducing skill mismatch.
- **PMIS:** Provides **structured internship opportunities to young graduates** in major companies, enabling practical workplace exposure and improving employability.
- **PLI Scheme & ELI Scheme:** Encourage industries to **expand manufacturing, investment and formal employment** by linking incentives with production and job creation.
- **MUDRA Yojana & Stand-Up India:** Promote **entrepreneurship and self-employment** by providing easier institutional credit to small businesses, women and disadvantaged groups.

Way forward

- **Rebalance Growth:** Promote labour-intensive sectors (manufacturing, MSMEs, tourism, care economy, green jobs).
- **Shift to Skill Economy:** Align higher education with industry demand; expand apprenticeships and OJT.
- **Restore Exam Integrity:** AI-enabled encrypted systems, fast-track courts under **Public Examinations Act, 2024**.
- **Talent Utilisation:** Use **National Career Service Portal** to absorb partially qualified candidates.
- **Formalise Gig Economy:** National framework for wage protection, insurance, and social security.
- **Global Skill Corridors:** Expand migration partnerships with UK, Germany, Japan, Australia for overseas opportunities.

Conclusion

India's youth unemployment crisis reflects a **structural imbalance between education, skills, and job creation**. To harness the demographic dividend, policies must shift from exam-centric employment to **inclusive, skill-driven, and private-sector opportunities**.

2. ILO CONVENTION ON DECENT WORK IN THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

Why in news?

- Recently, at the **114th International Labour Conference in Geneva**, India's government abstained the **ILO Convention No. 193**, the world's first legally binding treaty for gig and platform workers.

Features of Convention No. 193

- **Minimum Labour Standards:** Ensures fair wages, timely payments, occupational safety, and social security.
- **Algorithmic Transparency:** Platforms must disclose how automated systems decide work allocation, pay, ratings, and account deactivation.
- **Human Oversight:** Significant automated decisions require human review.

- **Worker Classification:** Governments must classify workers based on actual work performed, preventing misclassification as “independent contractors.”

India's Position

- **Government Abstention:** India's government abstained citing domestic legal and policy concerns.
- **Existing Framework:** The **Code on Social Security, 2020** already defines gig and platform workers and mandates aggregator contributions to a welfare fund.
- **Conformity Principle:** India ratifies ILO conventions only after aligning them fully with domestic law.
- **Federal Concerns:** Labour being a Concurrent List subject, states need flexibility in regulation.
- **Economic Considerations:** Provisions on reclassification and algorithmic transparency may raise compliance costs and affect digital innovation.

Consequences of Abstention

- **Worker Vulnerability:** Gig workers remain exposed to opaque algorithms and weak protections.
- **Global Gap:** Workers in countries ratifying the treaty gain enforceable rights, while Indian workers lag.
- **Legal Redress Foreclosed:** Without ratification, Indian workers cannot invoke international standards in domestic courts.
- **Global Standing:** Abstention may appear inconsistent with India's aspiration to lead the Global South.

Drivers of Gig Economy in India

- Expanding workforce projected to reach **23.5 million by 2030** (NITI Aayog).
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Internet penetration and smartphone adoption under **Digital India**.
- **Platform Commerce:** Growth of e-commerce, food delivery, ride-hailing.
- **Labour Market Pressures:** High unemployment and underemployment push youth into gig work.
- **Flexibility:** Youth preference for freelance and multiple income streams.

Domestic Legal Framework

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Defines gig and platform workers; mandates 1-2% aggregator turnover contribution to a welfare fund.
- **Implementation Gaps:** Benefits remain undefined and largely unimplemented.
- **State Initiatives:** Rajasthan enacted a **Platform-Based Gig Workers Act (2023)**; Karnataka and Telangana drafting welfare boards.

Way forward

- **Dedicated Gig Workers' Rights Law:** Guarantee minimum wages, regulated hours, paid leave, and collective bargaining.
- **Algorithmic Accountability:** Mandate transparency, grievance redressal, and human oversight.
- **Operationalise Social Security Fund:** Enforce aggregator contributions and integrate benefits via **e-Shram Portal**.
- **Minimum Earnings Standards:** Statutory floor wages and transparent surge pricing.
- **Universal Insurance:** Accident and health cover, climate-resilient safety norms.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

- **The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a unique UN agency** dedicated to promoting social justice, decent work, and internationally recognized labour rights worldwide. **It stands out as the only tripartite body**, giving equal voice to governments, employers, and workers.

Facts about ILO

- **Founded:** 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles.
- **UN Agency:** Became the first specialized UN agency in 1946.
- **Membership:** 187 member states.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **Recognition:** Awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 1969** for advancing social justice and peace.

Mission & Objectives

- **Promote Rights at Work:** Upholds fundamental labour rights including freedom of association, collective bargaining, and elimination of child/forced labour.
- **Decent Employment Opportunities:** Expands access to fair, safe, and productive jobs for men and women.
- **Social Protection:** Enhances coverage and effectiveness of social security systems globally.

Conclusion

India's abstention highlights the tension between protecting workers and promoting digital innovation. To harness the gig economy's potential, India must **bridge legal gaps, ensure social security, and embed algorithmic accountability** for inclusive growth.

II. Inclusive growth and issues**1. RISE OF RS. 100 CRORE INCOME EARNERS IN INDIA****Why in news?**

- Recently, the government informed Parliament that the number of individuals reporting **gross income above ₹100 crore** has crossed 500, sparking debate on inequality and inclusive growth.

Rise of High-Income Taxpayers

- **Sharp Increase:** 576 individuals reported incomes above ₹100 crore in AY 2025-26, a fourfold rise in five years.
- **Assessment Year Clarification:** AY 2025-26 corresponds to income earned in FY 2024-25.
- **No Legal Definition of Billionaire:** The Income Tax Act does not define "billionaire"; government reports only gross income declared in ITRs.
- **Data Limitations:** Government does not maintain wealth statistics; only income data is available.

Government Position

- **Improved Indicators:**
 - Decline in **Gini Coefficient** (0.237 rural, 0.284 urban) showing reduced consumption inequality.
 - **Unemployment rate** fell from 3.6% (2022) to 3.1% (2025).
- **Policy Measures:** Progressive taxation, food security schemes, higher spending on health and education, housing initiatives, and expanded social security.

Independent Estimates

- **World Inequality Report 2026:** Top 10% earn ~58% of national income. Bottom 50% earn only ~15%. Top 1% hold ~40% of wealth. Indicates growth of ultra-rich individuals.
- **Global Comparison:** India remains among the most unequal societies worldwide despite growth.
- **Ongoing National Household Income Survey (2026-27)** expected to provide comprehensive data on income distribution.

- **Social Dimension:** Highlights widening gap between rich and poor, raising questions on employment, investment, and equitable growth.

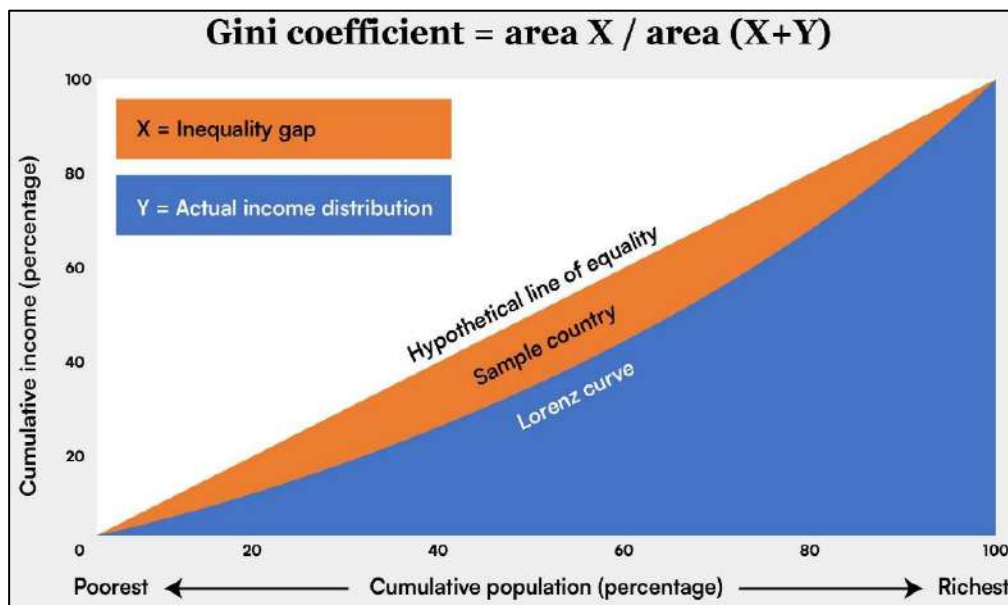
Way Forward

- **Strengthen Household Income Data:** Ensure robust surveys to complement tax-based statistics.
- **Progressive Taxation:** Maintain fair tax structures to redistribute resources.
- **Invest in Human Capital:** Increase spending on education, health, and skill development.
- **Promote Inclusive Growth:** Focus on rural employment, MSMEs, and social security expansion.
- **Address Wealth Concentration:** Encourage policies that reduce excessive accumulation at the top.
- **Transparent Public Debate:** Use official data to inform discussions on inequality and reforms.

Gini Coefficient

The Gini Coefficient is a statistical index used to measure income or wealth inequality within a population. It ranges from **0 (perfect equality)** to **1 (perfect inequality)**.

- **Application in Policy:** Governments and economists use it to track inequality trends, compare regions, and design welfare or taxation policies. For example, India's **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (2023-24)** reported a rural Gini of 0.237 and urban Gini of 0.284, indicating moderate inequality.



Conclusion

The surge in ₹100 crore income earners reflects India's economic dynamism but also underscores the **urgent need to balance growth with equity**, ensuring that prosperity translates into inclusive development for all sections of society.

III. Agriculture and allied

1. MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE AND THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE FARMER SUPPORT

Why in news?

- Recently, farmer protests in **Madhya Pradesh** over procurement of summer moong at MSP revived debates on the sustainability of India's MSP regime.

What is MSP?

- A pre-announced price at which the government procures certain crops to protect farmers from distress sales.
- Recommended by the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**, approved by the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)**.
- **Coverage:** MSP is announced for 22 crops plus FRP for sugarcane.
- **Procurement Agencies:** FCI, NAFED, and CCI.
- **Cost Formula:**
 - **A2:** Paid-out costs (seeds, fertilizer, labour).
 - **A2+FL:** Includes family labour.
 - **C2 + 50% (Swaminathan Formula):** Adds rent on owned land and interest on capital; demanded by farmer groups but not adopted due to fiscal burden.

Challenges in the MSP Regime

- **Fiscal Unsustainability:** Universal procurement could cost ₹10-17 lakh crore, crowding out investment in irrigation, R&D, and infrastructure.
- **Market Distortion:** Legally binding price floors discourage private buyers, creating government monopsony.
- **Cropping Pattern Issues:** Assured procurement of rice and wheat promotes monoculture, discouraging pulses and oilseeds.
- **Ecological Concerns:** Paddy cultivation in semi-arid Punjab and Haryana depletes groundwater and worsens stubble burning.
- **WTO Compliance:** Risk of breaching Amber Box limits under the **WTO Agreement on Agriculture**.

Alternatives to Strengthen Farmer Support

- **Minimum Income Support (MIP):** Direct per-acre transfers, supplemented by **PM-KISAN**.
- **Price Deficiency Payment (PDP):** Compensate farmers for the gap between MSP and market price (e.g., **PM-AASHA**).
- **Crop Diversification:** Incentivise pulses, oilseeds, and millets (**Shree Anna**) to reduce import dependence.
- **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs):** Strengthen bargaining power and market access.
- **Market & Infrastructure Reforms:** Expand **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)**, warehouses, cold chains, and **e-NAM** for transparent price discovery.

Conclusion

India must move beyond MSP-centric policies and adopt **income support, diversification, and market reforms** to ensure farmer welfare while maintaining fiscal sustainability and ecological balance.

2. NATIONAL INVESTMENT POLICY FOR UREA (NIPU) AND FERTILIZER SELF-RELIANCE

Why in news?

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the **National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU)-2026**, aimed at reducing dependence on imports.

Need for Policy Intervention

- **Import Dependence:** Despite capacity expansion, India continues to rely heavily on imported urea to meet domestic demand.
- **Global Vulnerabilities:** Frequent supply disruptions and volatile international prices expose India's fertilizer security risks.

- **Objective of NIPU-2026:** The policy aims to strengthen long-term fertilizer security, reduce import reliance, and safeguard farmer interests.

Key Features of NIPU-2026

- **Transparent Pricing:** Fixed and variable costs separated to improve clarity in fertilizer pricing.
- **Return on Equity:** Assured minimum RoE of 12% and maximum of 16% for investors.
- **Forex Risk Mitigation:** Fixed costs converted into INR after four years to reduce exchange rate volatility.
- **Investment Friendly Framework:** Designed to attract both public and private sector participation in new gas-based urea plants.

Evolution of Urea Policy

- **2012-13:** Introduction of the National Investment Policy to encourage new projects.
- **2014 Amendment:** Additional incentives provided to boost investment.
- **2015 Amendment:** Focus shifted to improving efficiency of gas-based plants.
- **Outcomes:** Six new plants established; domestic production rose from 225 LMT (2014-15) to 314 LMT (2023-24).

Current Fertilizer Scenario

- **Installed Capacity:** 33 operational units with ~269 LMT capacity.
- **Production:** 293 LMT in 2025-26, showing fluctuations despite expansion.
- **Requirement vs Availability:** Demand ~370 LMT; availability ~432 LMT, ensuring sufficient supply.
- **Subsidy Burden:** Fertilizer subsidy reached ₹2.17 lakh crore in 2025-26, with urea alone accounting for ₹1.42 lakh crore.

Government Measures

- **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT):** Fertilizer distribution through PoS devices with Aadhaar/KCC authentication ensures transparency and better targeting of subsidies.
- **Integrated Nutrient Management (INM):** Promotes balanced use of chemical, organic, and bio-fertilizers to maintain soil health and sustainable productivity.
- **Nano Urea Promotion:** Introduced as an innovative alternative to conventional urea, though adoption remains limited due to scientific and field-level debates.

Challenges

- **Import Dependence:** Despite capacity expansion, India continues to rely on imports to meet demand.
- **Rising Subsidy Burden:** Heavy fiscal pressure due to large allocations for urea subsidies.
- **Soil Degradation:** Excessive urea use leads to nutrient imbalance, declining fertility, and environmental concerns.
- **Slow Adoption of Alternatives:** Limited farmer acceptance of organic fertilizers and Nano Urea hampers sustainable nutrient management.

Way Forward

- **Accelerate Gas-Based Plants:** Speed up investment under NIPU-2026.
- **Promote Balanced Nutrient Use:** Strengthen INM and soil health cards.
- **Encourage Innovation:** Validate Nano Urea and other alternatives scientifically.
- **Improve Subsidy Efficiency:** Target subsidies better and gradually shift towards sustainable practices.
- **Strengthen Domestic Production:** Reduce exposure to global supply shocks.
- **Farmer Awareness:** Educate farmers on balanced application and long-term soil health.

Conclusion

NIPU-2026 reflects India's renewed push for **fertilizer self-reliance and food security**, but achieving sustainability will require balancing production expansion with rational use, subsidy reforms, and ecological responsibility.

3. INDIA'S SUGAR PRICE CRISIS

Why in News?

- India witnessed a sharp rise in **sugar prices in August 2026**, with retail prices increasing from around **₹48/kg in July to nearly ₹56-65/kg by late August**.

Causes of the Sugar Price Rise

- Lower Production:** Sugar production for 2025-26 is estimated at about **30.6 million tonnes**, lower than the initial estimate of 34.3 million tonnes, creating supply pressure.
- Weather Damage:** Excess rainfall and waterlogging in **Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat** reduced sugarcane growth and sucrose content.
- Pests and Diseases:** Uttar Pradesh's major **Co-0238 sugarcane variety** was affected by red rot disease and top shoot borer, lowering yields.
- Festive Demand:** Increased demand ahead of **Dussehra and Diwali** pushed up wholesale and retail sugar prices.
- Global Supply Constraints:** International sugar prices rose by over **16%**, while the global market is expected to face a sugar deficit in 2026-27.
- Hoarding and Speculation:** Stock-holding by traders, mills and speculative buying contributed to artificial scarcity and price escalation.

Ethanol Diversion Debate

The government has rejected claims that diversion of sugarcane for ethanol is responsible for the price rise.

- Sugar diverted for ethanol declined from around **12% in 2022-23 to about 9% in 2025-26**.
- Nearly **three-fourths of India's ethanol production now comes from grains**, especially maize.
- Ethanol diversion has helped manage India's traditional **sugar surplus**, preventing excessive inventories and improving mill liquidity.
- Improved mill finances have also facilitated timely payment of farmers' sugarcane dues.

However, with closing sugar stocks projected at around **41 lakh tonnes, the lowest in several years**, balancing ethanol production with food availability remains important.

Government Measures

- Stock Limits:** Dealers have been restricted to holding a maximum of **400 tonnes**, while bulk consumers face limits based on consumption.
- Duty-Free Imports:** The government approved imports of up to **10 lakh tonnes of raw sugar at zero duty** to increase domestic availability.
- Export Restrictions:** Sugar exports have been temporarily restricted to safeguard domestic supplies.
- Stock Verification:** Central and state teams have been directed to physically inspect mill inventories to prevent hoarding.
- Monitoring Bulk Buyers:** Mills must provide details of large institutional buyers to improve market transparency.
- Early Crushing:** Sugar mills have been encouraged to begin crushing earlier to improve supply during the festive season.

Global Sugar Production (2025-26, USDA Estimates)

Country	Production (Million Tonnes)	Global Share (%)
Brazil	43.8	24%
India	30-31.8	16%
EU-27	15.52	8%
China	12.6	7%

Conclusion

India must balance **affordable sugar availability with ethanol-blending goals** through flexible diversion policies and better stock management. Strengthening **climate-resilient farming, market monitoring and supply planning** is key to long-term price stability.

IV. Industry and Industrial Policies**1. INDIAN STATISTICAL INSTITUTE BILL (2026) AND AUTONOMY****Why in News?**

- The **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) Bill, 2026** was introduced in the Lok Sabha to replace the **Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959** to align ISI with IIT/IIM-style structures.

About Indian Statistical Institute

- Founded in **1931** by **P.C. Mahalanobis** as a statistical laboratory at Presidency College, Kolkata.
- Registered as a society under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**, later under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961.
- Declared an **Institution of National Importance** in 1959, gaining degree-granting powers and Central grants.
- Headquarters in **Kolkata**, with centres in **Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, and Tezpur**.
- Currently governed by a **33-member Council** and a **General Body of 1,000+ members**.

Government's Rationale for Reform

- Existing **society-based model** seen as unwieldy and outdated.
- No major governance reforms in **50 years**.
- Review Committees recommended **smaller councils**, but size grew to 33.
- Over-reliance on **elections** rather than merit-based appointments.
- Aim: Align ISI with **IITs/IIMs**, which function through compact, empowered Boards.

Key Changes Proposed

- ISI to become a **statutory body corporate** under Parliament.
- President of India** as Visitor of the institute.
- 11-member Board of Governors** as principal policy body:
 - Chairperson nominated by Visitor.
 - Two government officials.
 - Four eminent statisticians.
 - Four institute representatives.
 - Registrar as Secretary.
- Academic Council** headed by Director for academic matters.
- Director appointed by Board Chairperson from a panel recommended by a **search-cum-selection committee**.

- Visitor empowered to **remove Director** and order reviews.

Concerns

- **Centralisation of control:** 8 of 11 Board members linked to government.
- **Director's independence:** Appointment and removal powers seen as excessive.
- **Inadequate consultation:** Faculty and students allege lack of stakeholder involvement.
- **Headquarters ambiguity:** New Bill omits mention of Kolkata HQ, fuelling relocation fears.

Way Forward

- Balance **autonomy with accountability** by ensuring academic voices remain strong.
- Transparent **selection processes** for leadership roles.
- Safeguard **Kolkata headquarters** to preserve institutional heritage.
- Encourage **stakeholder consultation** for legitimacy of reforms.
- Align governance with modern needs while protecting **academic freedom**.

Conclusion

The ISI Bill, 2026 modernizes governance with IIT/IIM-style boards, aiming efficiency, but critics warn autonomy erosion, highlighting tension between government oversight and academic independence.

2. INDIA'S UPI TRANSACTION LEVY AND DIGITAL PAYMENTS

Why in News?

- The **Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** proposes enabling banks and payment providers to levy a **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** on UPI and RuPay debit card transactions.

What the Bill Proposes

- Amends the **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**.
- Introduces MDR of **0.3-0.5%** on transactions above ₹2,000.
- Applies only to **larger merchants crossing turnover thresholds**.
- **Small shopkeepers and P2P transfers remain exempt**.
- Finance Ministry clarified MDR is a **merchant fee, not a consumer tax**.

Why UPI Currently Has No Charges

- Since **January 2020**, MDR on UPI was removed to promote adoption.
- Government compensates banks and payment firms via **subsidies**.
- With UPI volumes now in **billions of transactions monthly**, subsidies lag behind actual infrastructure costs.
- RBI noted: "Costs must be borne by someone - government, merchants, or eventually customers."

US Trade Concerns over India's UPI Policy

- **USTR Classification (2026):** India's UPI framework was labelled a **trade barrier** by the US Trade Representative.
- **Policy Concerns:** The NPCI's **30% cap** on third-party UPI apps and the **dominance of RuPay** were flagged as restrictive measures.
- **Revenue Impact:** US card companies **Visa and Mastercard** lost significant business due to India's **zero-MDR policy**, which reduced their merchant fee income.

- **Market Dynamics:** Despite **PhonePe (Walmart-backed)** and **Google Pay (US-owned)** processing nearly **80% of UPI transactions**, US card networks remain disadvantaged in India's domestic payments ecosystem.

Global Pattern

- **Brazil:** US tariffs citing Pix platform.
- **Indonesia:** Local switching rules challenged by US.
- **Vietnam:** Domestic routing via NAPAS.
- **Turkey:** Preference for Troy card network.
- **China:** Exclusive access to UnionPay flagged by USTR.
- **GCC states:** Restrictions on US payment networks.

India's Concessions

- **Tax holiday till 2047** for foreign companies establishing data centres in India.
- **Abolition of 6% equalisation levy ("Google tax")** under US tariff pressure.
- Reflects India's **policy flexibility** and willingness to adjust rules during trade negotiations.

Implications

- **Domestic:** Ensures sustainability of UPI infrastructure while keeping merchant affordability in focus.
- **International:** Demonstrates that India's **digital payment sovereignty** is increasingly linked with trade diplomacy.
- **Economic:** Reduces government subsidy burden but risks **merchant resistance** to new charges.
- **Strategic:** Aligns India's payment ecosystem with **global norms**, strengthening its position in ongoing trade negotiations.

Merchant Discount Rate

MDR in UPI refers to the *Merchant Discount Rate*, a fee charged to merchants by banks or payment providers for processing digital transactions. Importantly, UPI users do not pay MDR - it applies only to merchants.



- It is a **percentage fee deducted from the transaction amount** that merchants pay to banks/payment service providers for enabling digital payments.

MDR in UPI Context

- **Standard UPI transactions (bank-to-bank P2M and P2P):** Currently **zero MDR**, meaning merchants and users are not charged.
- **Proposed changes (2026 Bill):** MDR of **0.25-0.5%** may apply to **merchant transactions above ₹2,000**, but **P2P transfers and small merchants remain exempt**.
- **Who pays?** Merchants, not customers. The fee is shared among banks, NPCI, and payment processors.

Conclusion

India's proposed UPI levy reflects fiscal reform and trade diplomacy, balancing domestic sustainability with global competitiveness to secure UPI's role as India's digital payments success story.

3. CORPORATE INVESTMENTS RISE IN INDIA AND CONSUMER DEMAND

Why in News

- The **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** released fresh data showing strong corporate investment announcements with weak consumer demand.

Industrial Production Trends

- IIP Performance:** The **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** reached a **23-month high in June 2026**, reflecting strong industrial momentum.
- Sectoral Drivers:** Growth was concentrated in **capital goods, infrastructure goods, and intermediate goods**, indicating investment-led expansion rather than consumption-driven growth.
- Consumer Goods Weakness:** Output of **consumer durables and non-durables** remained sluggish, especially in the last quarter, highlighting **soft household demand**.
- UPSC Relevance:** IIP acts as a **leading indicator of economic health**, showing divergence between **investment revival** and **consumption stagnation** - a critical dimension for **GDP growth analysis**.

Investment Trends

- Between **April-August 2026**, investment announcements worth **₹26.75 lakh crore** were made.
- 86% of investments** came from **domestic private firms**, showing confidence despite global uncertainty and US tariff pressures.
- Economists termed this revival "impressive," but sectoral concentration is evident.



Sectoral Concentration

- ITES sector:** 56% of investments, with **₹15 lakh crore** concentrated in 13 firms (data centres & AI).
- Conventional electricity:** 26% (~₹7 lakh crore), mostly in nuclear energy projects.
- Other sectors:** Aluminium (5%), steel (3.8%), electronics (1.9%), renewables (1%).
- Consumer goods:** Less than ₹2,000 crore (0.7%), reflecting weak demand and surplus capacity.

Consumer Demand Weakness

- Household consumption remains subdued, especially in **automobiles and durables**.
- Companies hesitate to expand consumer-facing capacity without demand visibility.

- BoB flagged mismatch between **investment revival and demand stagnation**.

Implications for Growth

- Weak demand drags down **GDP growth**, as consumption is a major driver.
- Investment also suffers, since firms avoid expansion without strong demand.
- Growth estimates for FY 2026-27 may fall below the **7% average of past three years**.
- Rural demand, linked to **monsoon performance**, will be crucial in shaping outcomes.

Way forward

- Government focus on **domestic investment revival** is positive, but demand-side measures are needed:
 - Boost **rural incomes** via MSP support and irrigation schemes.
 - Strengthen **employment programs** like MGNREGA.
 - Encourage **consumer credit and tax relief** to stimulate spending.
- Balanced growth requires both **investment push and consumption revival**.

Conclusion

India's investment surge is promising but narrow; without stronger household consumption, especially in rural areas, **broad-based and sustainable growth will remain elusive**.

V. Financial markets

1. SEBI BOND TOKENISATION AND INDIA'S DEBT MARKET

Why in News?

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has announced a **pilot project for bond tokenisation**.

What is Bond Tokenisation

- Converts traditional bonds into **digital tokens on blockchain**.
- Each token represents **fractional ownership**, ensuring investors receive **interest payments and principal repayment**.
- Enables **smaller ticket sizes**, opening corporate bonds to **retail investors**.

Difference from Traditional Bonds

- **Traditional Bonds:** Issuance, settlement, and custody involve multiple intermediaries, creating delays and costs.
- **Tokenised Bonds:** Issued, traded, and settled digitally with **real-time transaction records** and fewer intermediaries.
- **Accessibility:** Fractional ownership democratizes fixed-income investing, previously dominated by institutions.

Key Benefits

- **Faster Settlement:** Current T+2 cycle replaced by **real-time settlement**, reducing counterparty risk.
- **Transparency:** Immutable blockchain ledger records ownership, coupon payments, and redemptions.
- **Accessibility:** Retail investors gain entry into corporate bonds via fractional ownership.
- **Efficiency:** Simultaneous transfer of security and money reduces reconciliation costs.

Challenges

- **Cryptographic Vulnerability:** Future quantum computing may break blockchain security algorithms.

- **Interoperability Issues:** Legacy depository systems and blockchain integration remain untested at scale.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** No comprehensive legal framework for ownership rights, dispute resolution, or investor protection.
- **Liquidity Constraints:** Secondary market depth may remain limited in early pilot stages.

Way Forward

- Ensure successful **rollout of the bond tokenisation** pilot with RBI coordination, focusing on smart contract-based coupon payments.
- **Expand use of the Credit Risk-o-Meter** and Channel Partner Framework to improve transparency and bond access.
- **Build on digital Power** of Attorney reforms by further **reducing procedural delays**, in Indian debt markets.
- Integrate tokenisation, investor safeguards, and simplified onboarding into a unified strategy to modernise debt markets and attract sustainable foreign capital inflows.

Conclusion

SEBI's bond tokenisation pilot and digital FPI onboarding initiatives aim to deepen India's debt market through technology, enhance foreign capital access, and build a transparent, efficient ecosystem.

VI. Trade and External sector

1. GENERIC DRUG TARIFF THREAT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN PHARMA

Why in news?

- Recently, the US President announced plans to impose steep tariffs on imported **generic medicines**, raising concerns for India's pharmaceutical exports and global supply chains.

Pattern of Tariff Threats

- Past announcements targeted branded and patented medicines, though not implemented.
- Current proposal threatens **100% tariffs in two years, rising to 200% later**, aimed at reshoring drug manufacturing to the US.
- Experts suggest these threats are more about pressuring global pharma firms to invest in US facilities than actual tariff enforcement.

Why This Matters for India

- **US Market Dependence:** The US is India's largest pharma export destination, accounting for ~40% of exports.
- **Generic Dominance:** Nearly 90% of India's exports to the US are generics.
- **Economic Scale:** India exported ~\$9.7 billion worth of pharmaceuticals to the US in 2025.
- **Strategic Risk:** Tariffs could disrupt India's role as the "Pharmacy of the World," especially in affordable generics.

Indian Pharma's Response

- **Outbound Investments Rising:** Indian firms are expanding US presence to hedge against tariff uncertainty.
 - **Sun Pharma's \$11.8 billion acquisition of Organon & Co.** - largest overseas deal by an Indian pharma company.
 - April 2026 saw record M&A activity worth \$18.7 billion.
- **Existing US Facilities:** Sun Pharma, Zydus, Lupin, Aurobindo, Cipla, and Dr Reddy's already operate FDA-approved plants in the US.

- **Expansion Plans:** Cipla scaling up production in Massachusetts and New York; Dr Reddy's open to further US manufacturing.
- **Beyond Pharma:** Indian steel firms like JSW Steel also investing heavily in US plants.

Why Full Relocation Is Unlikely

- **Thin Margins:** Generic drugs operate on low profitability, making US-only production costly.
- **Global Supply Chains:** Dependence on APIs from India and China makes reshoring difficult.
- **Price Impact:** Domestic US production would raise medicine prices, risking public backlash.
- **Economic Logic:** India's cost advantage and established ecosystem make it globally competitive.

Implications for India and Global Supply Chains

- **Strategic Diversification:** Indian pharma must balance exports with overseas investments.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Over-dependence on one market (US) increases vulnerability.
- **Policy Dimension:** India may need to strengthen domestic R&D, API independence, and trade diversification.
- **Global Health Impact:** Higher US drug prices could affect access to affordable medicines worldwide.

Way Forward

- **Diversify Export Markets:** Reduce over-dependence on the US by expanding into Europe, Africa, Latin America, and ASEAN where demand for affordable generics is rising.
- **Strengthen Domestic API Production:** Invest in bulk drug parks and schemes under the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** to reduce reliance on China for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients.
- **Expand US Manufacturing Presence:** Continue strategic acquisitions and FDA-approved plant expansions in the US to hedge against tariff risks.
- **Promote R&D and Innovation:** Shift focus from low-margin generics to biosimilars, specialty drugs, and novel therapies to sustain competitiveness.

Conclusion

The tariff threat underscores the need for India to **diversify markets, and expand global partnerships**. While reshoring generics fully to the US is economically implausible, India must adapt strategically to safeguard its role as the world's leading supplier of affordable medicines.

2. REVIEW OF INDIA'S MODEL BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY (BIT)

Why in News?

- The **Union Finance Ministry** is reviewing India's **2015 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** to make it more investor-friendly while safeguarding sovereign interests.

Understanding BIT

- Agreement between two countries to **promote and protect investments**.
- Guarantees **fair and equitable treatment**, protection against **unlawful expropriation**, and access to **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**.
- **BIT vs Trade Agreement:**
 - BIT allows investors to directly sue host governments.
 - Trade agreements involve **state-to-state dispute settlement**.
 - BITs expose governments to greater legal risk, while trade agreements provide more diplomatic flexibility.

Reasons for Review

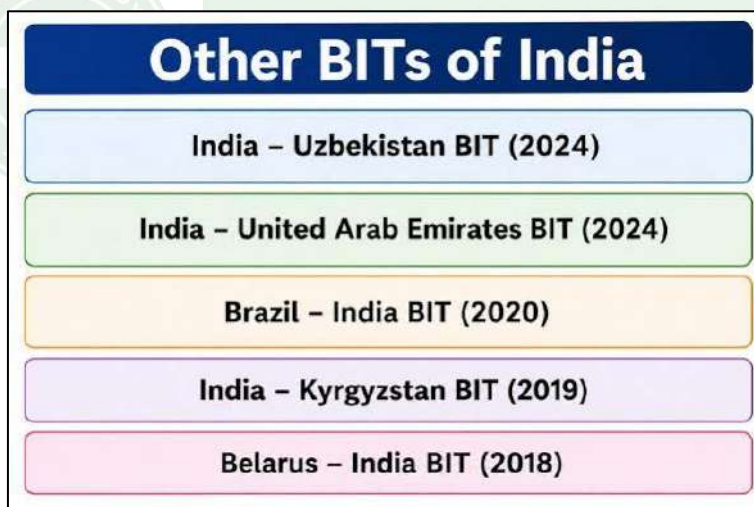
- Experience from past treaty negotiations highlighted restrictive provisions.
- Need to align with **global best practices** in investment protection.
- Rising **Overseas Direct Investment (ODI)** by Indian firms requires reciprocal safeguards abroad.
- Declining **net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** necessitates attracting higher-quality inflows without compromising regulatory autonomy.
- India's role has shifted from being a **capital importer** to also a **capital exporter**.

Protecting Indian Investors Overseas

- ODI has grown significantly, changing India's negotiating priorities.
- Future BITs must ensure **investment protection for Indian enterprises abroad**.
- Investor-protection clauses, earlier viewed cautiously, may now be retained to secure overseas investments.
- Reflects India's transition towards a **globally competitive capital-exporting economy**.

Issues in 2015 Model BIT

- **Local Remedies Clause:** Requires foreign investors to exhaust domestic legal remedies for five years before approaching international arbitration.
- Criticised as **restrictive** by developed countries and investors.
- Slowed India's ability to conclude new BITs.
- Government now considering a **negative-list approach** - retaining only critical sovereign concerns as non-negotiable.



India's Policy Position

- Regulatory and enforcement actions are becoming more **procedure-driven and transparent**, reducing uncertainty for investors.
- **Frivolous or excessive actions** are being curtailed to reassure both domestic and foreign investors.
- Emphasis on **predictable regulation, policy stability, and attractive returns** to strengthen investor confidence.
- Greater **engagement and communication with investors** planned to address concerns and improve India's global investment image.

Significance

- India's Model BIT revision **modernises the treaty framework**, aligning it with evolving global standards and investor expectations.

- It **enhances India's attractiveness as an investment destination**, creating a transparent and predictable environment for foreign capital.
- The framework **protects Indian firms investing abroad**, ensuring reciprocal safeguards as India emerges as a capital exporter.
- It **supports Balance of Payments stability**, by encouraging steady inflows and reducing volatility in international capital movements.

Challenges

- Ensuring the right balance between **investor rights and sovereign powers** remains a complex negotiation challenge.
- Making India's BIT framework **acceptable to developed nations** without compromising national interests is a diplomatic hurdle.
- Preventing **excessive litigation under Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)** mechanisms is critical to avoid costly arbitration.
- Addressing the **decline in net FDI amid global localisation trends** requires innovative policy measures.

Conclusion

India's BIT revision is a **strategic recalibration**, aiming to balance **investor protection with sovereign autonomy**, while securing India's position as both a capital importer and exporter.

B. ENVIRONMENT

I. Biodiversity and conservation

1. SUPREME COURT ON EX-POST FACTO ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCES (ECS)

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court recently struck down the Union Government's **2021 Office Memorandum (OM)** that allowed retrospective environmental clearances for projects started without prior approval.

Background

- **EIA Notification, 2006:** Mandates that specified projects must obtain prior Environmental Clearance (EC) before starting construction or operations.
- **Violation of Norms:** Several projects commenced without securing ECs, leading to regulatory gaps.
- **Government Interventions:**
 - **2017 Notification:** Provided a one-time, six-month amnesty for violators to disclose and seek EC post-appraisal.
 - **2021 Office Memorandum (OM):** Introduced a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for granting ongoing ex-post facto clearances to violation cases.

Supreme Court Ruling

- **2021 OM Invalid:** Declared ultra vires as it lacked statutory authority and created perpetual regularisation.
- **Limited Amnesty Permissible:** Statutory notification under **Section 3 of EPA, 1986** may allow narrowly tailored relief in public interest.
- **Prospective Operation:** Clearances already granted under 2021 OM remain valid; ruling applies prospectively.
- **Key Principle:** Executive orders cannot override delegated legislation.

Evolution of Jurisprudence

- **Common Cause v. Union of India (2017):** Held that prior EC is mandatory for mining projects.
- **Alembic Pharmaceuticals v. Rohit Prajapati (2020):** Declared ex-post facto EC inconsistent with the Precautionary Principle.
- **Pahwa Plastics v. Dastak (2022):** Adopted a pragmatic approach, allowing remediation instead of immediate closure in certain cases.
- **Vanashakti Case (2025):** Initially struck down both 2017 and 2021 measures; later partially recalled in review.
- **Present Judgment (2026):** Differentiated between permissible statutory amnesty and impermissible administrative regularisation.

Constitutional Principles

- **EPA, 1986 (Section 3):** Provides statutory basis for environmental protection notifications.
- **General Clauses Act, 1897:** Allows modification or issuance of statutory notifications where authorised.
- **Fundamental Rights:**
 - **Article 14:** Arbitrary regularisation violates equality before law.
 - **Article 21:** Right to life includes the right to a healthy environment.
- **Jan Vishwas Act, 2023:** Decriminalised certain violations but did not permit blanket post-facto approvals.

Projects Affected

- **Before SC Stay (Jan 2024):** Over 100 projects had already received ex-post facto ECs; ~150 more were under appraisal.
- **Types of Projects:** Coal, iron, bauxite mines; airports; cement and steel plants; chemical industries; industrial estates; hospitals; and commercial complexes.

Significance of the Judgment

- **Reinforces Precautionary Principle:** Strengthens the preventive approach in environmental law by ensuring approvals must precede project activity.
- **Prevents Routine Legalisation:** Stops the practice of regularising violations through perpetual ex-post facto clearances.
- **Strengthens Rule of Law:** Reaffirms that executive instructions cannot override statutory provisions or delegated legislation.
- **Balances Development and Ecology:** Recognises the need to harmonise economic growth with environmental protection.

Conclusion

The judgment underscores that **environmental protection cannot be compromised for administrative convenience**; only statutory, narrowly defined amnesties in genuine public interest are permissible.

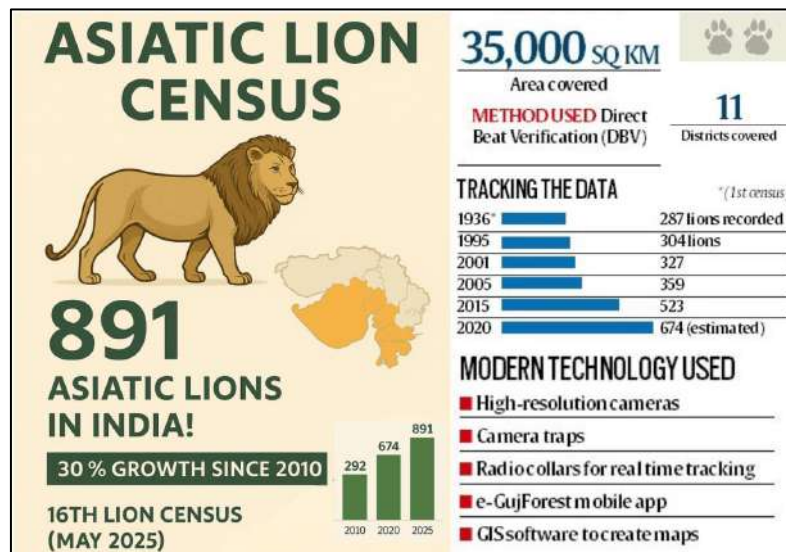
2. ASIATIC LION CONSERVATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The **2026 Asiatic Lion Census** reported the population crossing **1,000 individuals in the Gir landscape**, marking a major conservation success.

Achievements in Conservation

- Population recovery from **~100 lions in the 1960s to over 1,000 today**.
- Nearly half the lions now live **outside protected areas**, showing successful natural dispersal.
- Conservation evolved from a **protected-area approach to landscape-level strategy**.

- Lions diverse habitats: **Girnar hills, Mitiyala forests, Savarkundla-Liliya, Bhavnagar coast**, and adjoining agricultural fields.
- Success supported by Strong political commitment, Efficient Forest administration, Sustained financial support and Local community cooperation



Challenges

- **Single Landscape Risk:** Entire population concentrated in Gir-Saurashtra, vulnerable to epidemics or disasters.
- **Disease Outbreaks:** 2018 Canine Distemper Virus killed 20+ lions, highlighting vulnerability.
- **Habitat Fragmentation:** Infrastructure, urbanisation, and land-use change threaten corridors.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** Expansion into agricultural areas increases risks.
- **Lack of Second Population:** Despite scientific consensus, relocation to another site (e.g., Kuno National Park) faces resistance.

Way Forward

- Conserve and restore **wildlife corridors** across Gir and Saurashtra.
- Prevent **habitat fragmentation** from infrastructure projects.
- Strengthen **disease surveillance and veterinary preparedness**.
- Promote **community-based coexistence** with compensation schemes.
- Establish a **second free-ranging population** to reduce ecological risks.
- Adopt a **long-term landscape-based conservation strategy** beyond Gir National Park.

Asiatic Lion

- **Scientific Name:** *Panthera leo persica*.
- **Exclusive Range:** Found **only in India** in the wild, confined to the **Gir landscape of Gujarat**.
- **Historic Distribution:** Once widespread across **West Asia and northern India**, now restricted to Gujarat.
- **Physical Features:** Slightly smaller than African lions, with a **distinct belly fold** along the abdomen.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
 - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I species (highest protection)
 - **CITES:** Appendix I (strict international trade regulation)

Gir National Park

- Established in **1965**, covering ~1,412 sq km in Gujarat.

- Core habitat of the Asiatic lion, also home to leopards, striped hyenas, jackals, and over 300 bird species.
- Famous for its **dry deciduous forests, grasslands, and riverine ecosystems**.
- Acts as the **last natural refuge** of Asiatic lions, with strict protection measures.
- Tourism and eco-development programmes have helped build awareness and community support.

Conclusion

Asiatic lion recovery is remarkable, yet future survival demands diversification, corridor protection, disease surveillance, and community integration, ensuring India's pride thrives through holistic landscape-level conservation planning.

3. ELEPHANT CORRIDORS IN INDIA AND CONSERVATION

Why in News?

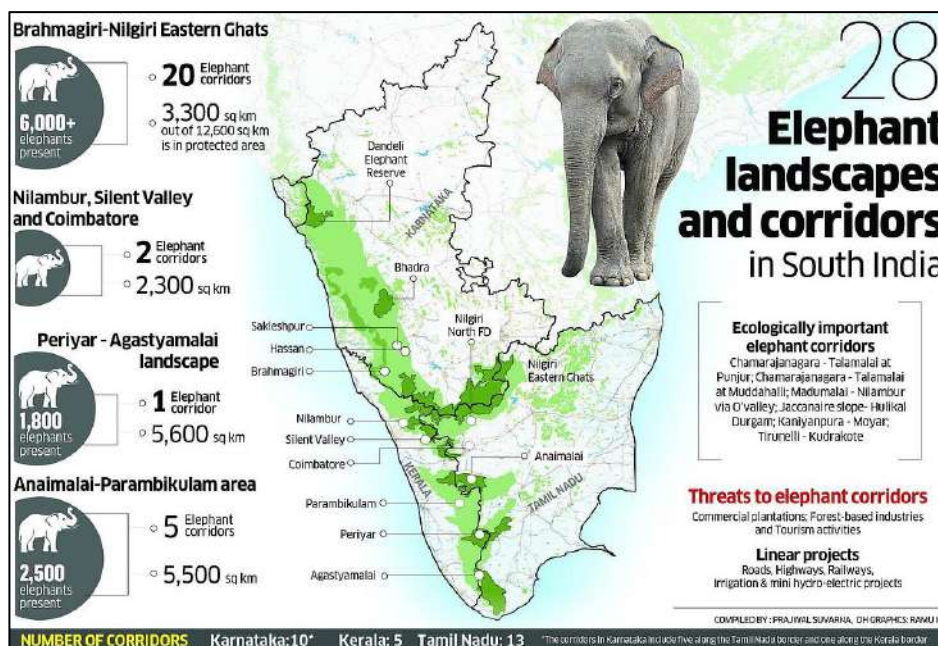
- The Supreme Court ordered a fresh survey of elephant corridors, ruling natural routes cannot be blocked and banning coercive diversion measures.

Why Elephants Move Long Distances

- **Mobility:** Asian elephants have home ranges spanning **50-300 sq km**, expanding with resource availability.
- **Seasonal Migration:** Movement shaped by **food and water distribution**; e.g., elephants migrate into Kerala's moist forests during dry months.
- **Climate Drivers:** Droughts and climate change historically influenced migrations.
- **Corridor Role:** Corridors enable access to food, dispersal, and seasonal movement, reducing human-elephant conflict.

India's Elephant Landscapes

- **Western Ghats:** 11,934 elephants (53.2%) - Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala.
- **North-Eastern Hills & Brahmaputra floodplains:** 6,559 elephants (29.2%).
- **Shivalik Hills & Gangetic plains:** 2,062 elephants (9.2%).
- **Central India & Eastern Ghats:** 1,891 elephants (8.4%).
- **Total Population:** 22,446 elephants (SAIEE 2021-25).



Fragmentation Challenges

- **Western Ghats:** Habitat fragmentation due to plantations, fencing, invasive species.
- **Shivalik & Brahmaputra Plains:** Railways, highways, power lines disrupting corridors.
- **Central India & Eastern Ghats:** Mining in Jharkhand & Odisha, drought-driven migration, expansion into Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra.

Why Corridors Matter

- **Genetic Exchange:** Maintain diversity between fragmented populations.
- **Resource Access:** Seasonal food and water availability.
- **Conflict Reduction:** Natural movement reduces crop raiding and human-elephant clashes.

Corridor Mapping & Findings

- **2023 Survey:** Documented **150 corridors across 15 States**.
- **South India:** Bottlenecks in 32 corridors due to highways, rail projects, hydel dams, power lines, resorts.
- **West Bengal:** Highest number - 26 corridors.
- **Example:** Charmar-Jingol corridor (Chhattisgarh) - 20 km long, 2.5 km wide, supports 80-100 elephants migrating from Odisha.

Judicial & Policy Significance

- Supreme Court's directive reinforces **legal protection of corridors**.
- Recognises corridors as **ecological lifelines** essential for conservation and conflict mitigation.
- Aligns with India's commitments under **Project Elephant, National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-31)**, and **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.

Conclusion

Elephant corridors are crucial ecological pathways that sustain genetic diversity, seasonal migration, and reduce conflict. With mining, infrastructure, and land-use change obstructing them, the Supreme Court's intervention underscores the urgent need for conservation safeguards.

II. Environmental pollution

1. INDIA'S ARCTIC STRATEGY AND CLIMATE IMPERATIVES

Why in News?

- A **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs** report has flagged a widening gap between India's **Arctic ambitions** and its actual capabilities, despite the **Arctic Policy 2022** framework.

India's Arctic presence

- **Historic Link:** India, original 1920 Svalbard Treaty signatory, enjoys visa-free Arctic access rights.
- **Scientific Presence:** Himadri station (2008, Svalbard) ensures India's permanent Arctic scientific research base.
- **Observer Status:** Since 2013, India participates in Arctic Council working groups, contributing climate data.
- **Research Focus:** Studies on glaciology, monsoon teleconnections, sea-ice dynamics, and atmospheric circulation patterns.
- **Diplomatic Advantage:** India maintains goodwill with Arctic states, strengthened by Nordic Summit and Canada ties.

- **Policy Framework:** Arctic Policy 2022 outlines six pillars: science, climate, economy, connectivity, collaboration.

Climate Security Imperatives

- **Monsoon Linkage:** Arctic warming alters atmospheric circulation, impacting the **Southwest Monsoon** that supports **18% of GDP and half of India's population**.
- **Sea-Level Rise:** Melting Arctic ice drives global sea-level rise, threatening **India's 11,098 km coastline** and vulnerable South Asian regions.
- **Humanitarian Risks:** Over **250 million people** in coastal South Asia could be affected by mid-century, with migration and security implications.

Geopolitical Stakes

- **Strategic Partners:** US and Russia are Arctic nations; China, despite being non-Arctic, invests heavily in Arctic shipping and infrastructure.
- **Great-Power Competition:** Arctic emerging as a hub for **energy security, maritime access, and critical minerals**.
- **Diplomatic Advantage:** India enjoys goodwill with all **eight Arctic states**, reinforced by the **India-Nordic Summit** and ties with Canada.

Challenges

- **No Polar Ambassador:** Arctic affairs fragmented across four MEA divisions; unlike other nations, India lacks a dedicated envoy.
- **Absence of Polar Research Vessel (PRV):** Sanctioned in **2014**, still undelivered; India relies on foreign collaboration. China already operates multiple polar vessels, including a nuclear icebreaker.
- **Funding Deficit:** India spent just **₹17.53 crore on Arctic activities (2024-25)** - less than one-tenth of Antarctic spending, and lower than building 1 km of flyover.

Way Forward

- Appoint a **Polar Ambassador** for coherent policy.
- Expedite delivery of **Polar Research Vessel** to ensure independent research.
- Increase funding proportionate to **climate and geopolitical stakes**.
- Strengthen **scientific collaboration** and expand beyond research into **energy, shipping, and minerals**.
- Build **strategic partnerships** with Arctic states for long-term access and resilience.

Conclusion

India's Arctic legitimacy is strong, but **capabilities lag behind ambitions**. Converting policy intent into concrete capacity is vital for **climate security and strategic influence**.

III. Waste management

1. INDIA'S SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Why in News?

- The **Supreme Court** has directed the **MoEF&CC** to frame guidelines for imposing and collecting **environmental compensation** under the **Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026**.

Solid Waste Situation in India

- India generates approximately **1.85 lakh tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) every day**, reflecting the scale of urban consumption and disposal challenges.
- This translates to nearly **62 million tonnes annually**, making India one of the largest solid waste producers globally.
- Around **1.79 lakh tonnes (≈95%)** of daily waste is collected, showing strong coverage but with gaps in segregation and quality.
- Only **1.14 lakh tonnes (≈62%)** is scientifically treated, leaving a significant portion unmanaged and contributing to environmental hazards.
- The **CPCB projects 165 million tonnes annually by 2030**, driven by rapid **urbanisation and rising consumption patterns**, underscoring urgent need for sustainable waste governance.



Key Provisions of Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules

- **Four-Stream Segregation:** Dry, wet, sanitary, hazardous/special-care waste.
- **Circular Economy:** Emphasis on reduction, reuse, and local processing.
- **National Monitoring Portal:** Centralised digital platform for municipal and rural waste data.
- **Producer & Bulk Generator Accountability:** Expanded responsibilities for large waste generators.
- **Legacy Dumpsite Remediation:** Mandatory time-bound landfill remediation.
- **Rule 17 (Environmental Compensation):** Compensation imposed on violators under polluter pays principle.

Supreme Court Guidelines on Compensation

- **Restitutionary Nature:** Compensation restores damaged environment, not a substitute for fines.
- **Structured Regime:** Transparent rules for predictable penalties.
- **Tangible & Intangible Damage:** Covers ecological, health, and social impacts.
- **Potential Harm:** Liability even without actual damage if risk is significant.
- **Proportionality:** Compensation linked to extent and duration of harm.
- **Monitoring:** Central Implementation Committee (CIC) to oversee portal and standardise rules.
- **Escrow Account:** Compensation funds dedicated exclusively to SWM projects.

Challenges

- **Collection & Transport Breakdown:** Waste often mixed again in trucks, contaminating recyclables.
- **Flawed Data:** Official reports overstate collection/processing; CAG audits expose discrepancies.
- **Local Body Capacity:** Lack of expertise, trained staff, and stable funding.
- **Technology-Market Mismatch:** Facilities built without considering local waste composition or demand (e.g., Okhla compost plant underutilised).

Way Forward

- **Source Segregation:** Enforce multi-stream segregation at household and bulk generator levels.
- **Digital Verification:** Install weighbridges at transfer stations for accurate tonnage reporting.
- **Third-Party Audits:** Independent audits to validate municipal data; strict penalties for misreporting.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure:** Use AI and big data for decision support systems.
- **Technology Suitability Matrix:** Guide local authorities in choosing appropriate processing technologies.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's framework for **environmental compensation** strengthens enforcement, ensuring violators pay for ecological damage. The challenge now lies in **implementation, accurate data, and local capacity building**.

IV. Renewable Energy

1. TRANSMISSION BOTTLENECKS AND INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY

Why in news?

- Nearly **21 GW of renewable energy capacity** is stranded under temporary grid connections due to transmission delays, raising concerns about project viability, financial risks, and India's clean energy targets.

Transmission Challenges

- **Generation vs Transmission Mismatch:** Renewable energy capacity is expanding rapidly, but transmission infrastructure is not keeping pace, leaving projects stranded.
- **Curtailment of Power:** Nearly 12 GW of renewable capacity faces evacuation restrictions, especially during peak solar hours, reducing actual output.
- **FY26 Curtailment Data:** Around 6,900 GWh of clean electricity was curtailed in FY26; in April-June alone, ~8,133 GWh of solar generation could not be evacuated.

GNA-T-GNA Framework

- **General Network Access (GNA):** Provides firm evacuation rights for long-term transmission-connected projects.
- **Temporary GNA (T-GNA):** Stopgap arrangement; projects can transmit power only when spare capacity exists.
- **Priority Rule:** GNA projects get preference during congestion, forcing T-GNA projects to curtail up to 70-80% of capacity.

Financial Stress on Developers

- **Revenue Loss:** Compensation is not provided for T-GNA curtailment, eroding project income.
- **Severe Curtailment:** In Rajasthan, curtailment touched 90-95%, affecting ~4 GW capacity.
- **Unsustainable Financing:** Developers rely on equity and reserves instead of power revenue.
- **Industry Demands:** Calls for moratoriums, concessional bridge financing, extended loan tenures, and debt restructuring.

Risk of NPAs and Systemic Impact

- **Banking Exposure:** 12 public sector banks plus IREDA, PFC, REC, NaBFID, IIFCL, and SIDBI invested ~₹5.08 lakh crore in RE (FY25-26).
- **Project Viability:** Curtailment of >50% during peak hours threatens loan servicing.
- **Investor Confidence:** Delays in transmission commissioning risk IRRs, cash flows, and future capacity additions.

Challenges

- **Transmission Lag:** Dedicated lines not keeping pace with RE growth; 21 GW stranded.
- **Curtailment Losses:** FY26 saw ~6,900 GWh curtailed, undermining India's 2030 RE targets.
- **Financial Risk:** ₹5.08 lakh crore exposure of banks and institutions vulnerable to NPAs if delays persist.

Way Forward

- **Integrated Planning:** Synchronise RE generation with transmission expansion under the National Electricity Plan.
- **Green Corridors Expansion:** Accelerate dedicated transmission lines for RE evacuation.
- **Financial Safeguards:** Provide bridge financing and flexible repayment terms to developers.
- **Smart Grid Solutions:** Use AI-based monitoring to manage demand and supply efficiently.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Strengthen interstate transmission to balance surplus and deficit states.

Conclusion

India's renewable energy boom risks being undermined by transmission bottlenecks making **grid expansion and planning as critical as generation capacity** for achieving clean energy goals.

V. Global Warming and Climate Change

1. BALANCING DIGITAL GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Why in news?

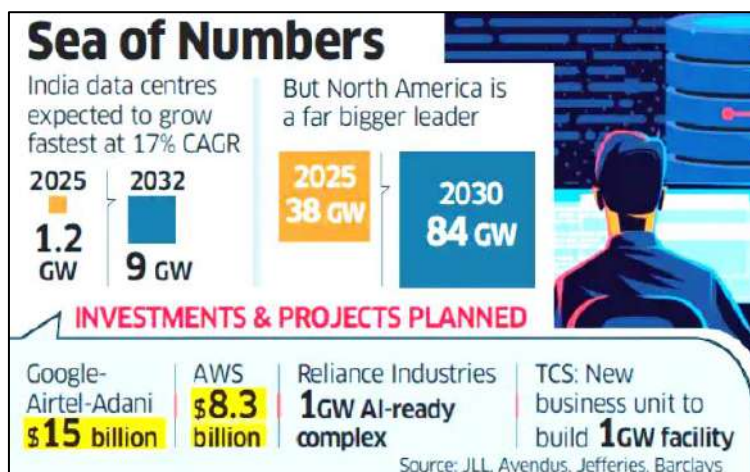
- Recently, citizens in **Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra** protested against proposed mega data centre projects, citing risks of water stress, electricity demand, and ecological damage.

What are data centers?

- A **data center** is a physical location designed to house computing infrastructure such as **servers, storage devices, routers, switches, firewalls, and cooling systems**.
- It provides a secure, scalable, and reliable environment for running applications, storing information, and supporting business operations.

Data Centre Growth in India

- **Digitalisation:** Rapid expansion of e-governance, e-commerce, digital payments, and online services.
- **Artificial Intelligence & Cloud Computing:** AI-specific capacity projected to rise sharply by 2030.
- **Large Consumer Base:** Over a billion internet users and billions of monthly UPI transactions.
- **Government Incentives:** States offering subsidised land, tax breaks, and faster approvals (e.g., Gujarat Data Centre Policy 2026-29).
- **Global Investments:** Google, Amazon, Reliance, Meta, and TCS building hyperscale facilities.
- **Data Localisation:** Push to store Indian users' data domestically for sovereignty and security.



Challenges

- **Water Stress:** Cooling systems consume massive quantities of water, worsening shortages in stressed cities.
- **Electricity Burden:** AI centres could add over 25 GW demand by 2031-32, straining grids.
- **Environmental Impact:** Fossil fuel dependence, diesel backup, and emissions raise ecological risks.
- **Limited Local Jobs:** Capital-intensive projects create few permanent employment opportunities.
- **Transparency Deficit:** Weak public consultation and unclear resource use figures.
- **Financial Risks:** Heavy subsidies and uncertain AI returns may lead to stranded assets.

Measures Needed

- **Transparent Resource Disclosure:** Verified data on water, power, emissions before approvals.
- **Mandatory Public Consultation:** Involve local communities and environmental groups.
- **Water-Sensitive Planning:** Use treated wastewater, closed-loop cooling, rainwater harvesting.
- **Strengthened Environmental Assessment:** Evaluate cumulative impacts on ecology and health.

Conclusion

India's data centres are vital for digital growth and AI ambitions, but unchecked expansion risks **deepening ecological stress**. Sustainable siting, transparent governance, and equitable benefit-sharing are essential to align digital infrastructure with the vision of a **water-secure and environmentally resilient Viksit Bharat**.

C. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

I. Disasters and their management

1. EARTHQUAKE SWARMS IN MAHARASHTRA AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Why in News?

- Maharashtra has recently witnessed an **earthquake swarm** around **Nashik and Palghar**, prompting renewed focus on managing **human-earthquake conflict** and strengthening disaster preparedness.

What is an Earthquake Swarm

- Unlike conventional sequences (mainshock + aftershocks), swarms lack a dominant event.
- Comprise **numerous small quakes** of comparable magnitude over **days to months**.
- Do not necessarily precede a larger earthquake.
- Example: **Palghar (2018-19)** recorded thousands of tremors over a year.

Why Maharashtra Experiences Swarms

- **Intraplate Earthquakes:** Occur within tectonic plate interiors, not boundaries.
- **Deccan Traps:** Ancient basaltic lava flows with fractures and shear zones act as stress pathways.
- **Plate Movements:** Indian plate's ongoing motion accumulates stress even away from boundaries.
- **Local Weaknesses:** Nashik region shows structural fractures enabling seismic release.

Role of Rainfall & Groundwater

- Heavy rainfall infiltrates rocks, raising **pore-fluid pressure**.
- Increased pressure reduces friction, triggering slips along fractures.
- Palghar studies (2019-20) linked rainfall to increased seismicity and land subsidence.
- However, rainfall is not sole cause; tectonic stresses and faulting also contribute.

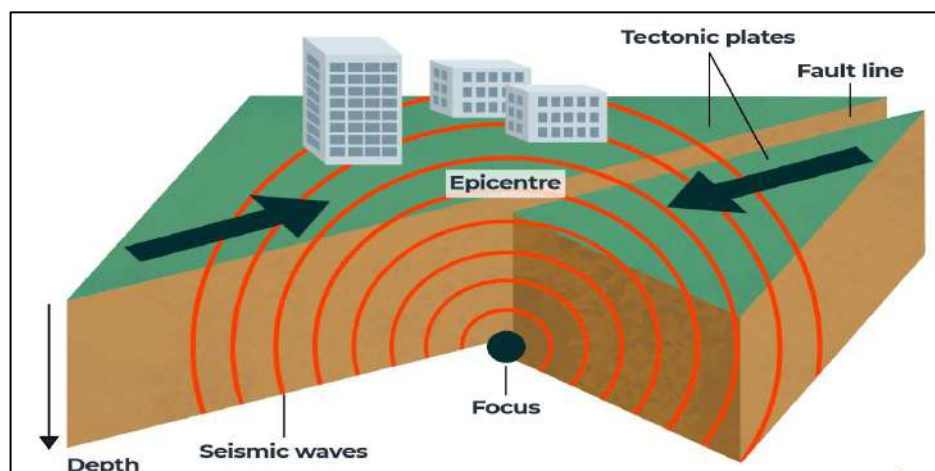
Reservoir-Induced Seismicity - Koyna Case

- **Koyna Dam (1967):** Magnitude 6.3 quake killed 200+ people.
- Reservoir filling altered crustal load and pore pressure, triggering seismicity.
- Demonstrates complex interplay of **human activity, hydrology, and tectonics**.

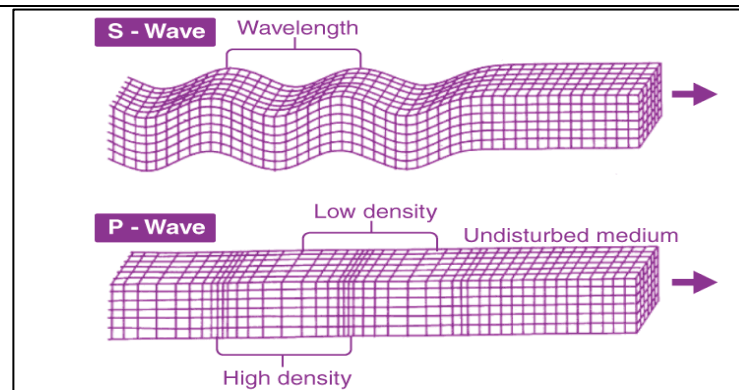
Significance for Disaster Management

- Swarms neither guarantee nor rule out larger quakes.
- Preparedness measures:
 - Strengthen **dense seismic monitoring networks**.
 - Improve **microzonation and hazard mapping**.
 - Enforce **earthquake-resistant building codes**.
 - Assess **critical infrastructure** (dams, bridges, hospitals).
 - Study **rainfall-seismicity linkages**.
 - Enhance **public awareness and emergency drills**.
- Effective **scientific communication** reduces panic during shallow, moderate tremors.

Earthquake



- Occurs when **stress in Earth's crust** causes rocks to slip along faults.
- Release of energy generates **seismic waves**:
 - **P-waves:** Compressional, travel fastest.
 - **S-waves:** Shear, move rocks perpendicular.
 - **Surface waves:** Travel along crust, cause maximum shaking.



- Represents sudden release of **accumulated tectonic stress**.

Conclusion

Maharashtra's earthquake swarms show seismic activity can occur far from boundaries. Prediction remains difficult, but monitoring, resilient infrastructure, and rainfall-groundwater studies mitigate intraplate risks.

D. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

I. Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

1. RESPONSIBLE AI FOR ADOLESCENT LEARNING

Why in News?

- On **August 18, 2026**, OpenAI launched **ChatGPT for Teens**, a version of its generative AI platform tailored for adolescents aged **13-17 years**, with enhanced safeguards.

Key Safety Features

- **Parental Controls:** Linked accounts allow parents to configure settings and receive alerts in high-risk situations.
- **Quiet Hours:** Restricts usage during specified times to reduce screen addiction and late-night dependence.
- **Content Restrictions:** Filters harmful topics like self-harm, violence, eating disorders, and explicit material.
- **Human Intervention:** High-risk cases flagged for moderators, acknowledging AI's limits in handling distress.
- **Privacy Options:** Teens can disable memory and voice mode, reducing personalization and human-like simulation.
- **Study Mode:** Encourages step-by-step problem solving, fostering **critical thinking and analytical skills**.

Why Safeguards Are Necessary

- **Emotional Vulnerability:** Adolescents may form unhealthy attachments to empathetic AI chatbots.
- **Legal Concerns:** Lawsuits allege AI interactions contributed to harmful outcomes (e.g., case of 16-year-old Adam Raine).
- **Learning Risks:** Over-reliance on AI for assignments may weaken independent reasoning.
- **Regulatory Gap:** India lacks standalone AI legislation for minors; current frameworks rely on **data protection and child safety laws**.

Global and Indian Context

- **US & UK:** Debating stricter safeguards for minors using AI companions.

- **India:** States rely on **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023)** and child-safety norms, but no AI-specific law exists.
- **CAG Data (2025):** 24% of Indian adolescents reported using AI tools for schoolwork, highlighting urgency for regulation.

Way Forward

- Establish **age-appropriate AI safety standards**.
- Strengthen **privacy protections** for minors' data.
- Mandate **independent audits** of AI safety mechanisms.
- Promote **digital literacy** among students, parents, and teachers.
- Ensure access to **school counsellors and mental-health services**.
- Encourage **safety-by-design principles** in AI development.

Digital Literacy

- **Definition:** The ability to **navigate, evaluate, and create information** using digital tools like computers, smartphones, internet platforms, and apps.
- **Core Skills:** Includes operating devices, using online services, ensuring cyber safety, and critically assessing digital content.
- **Significance:** Essential for participation in a **knowledge economy**, accessing government schemes, and bridging the digital divide.

Status in India

- **Schools:** Only **64.7% of schools** have functional computers; **63.5% have internet connectivity** (UDISE+ 2024-25).
- **Households:** **59.2% households own smartphones**; internet use is **53.6% rural vs. 74% urban**.
- **Gender Gap:** Only **25% of rural women** use the internet compared to **51% urban women**.
- **Youth Access:** Among 15–24-year-olds, **82% rural youth use devices**, but girls lag boys by 13%.

Conclusion

ChatGPT for Teens is a pioneering step in age-sensitive AI design, combining parental controls, study mode, and safeguards, highlighting India's need for child-centric AI governance framework.

II. Indigenization of Technology and Developing New Technology.

1. INDIA'S OVERSEAS CRITICAL MINERAL QUEST

Why in News?

- India, through **KABIL**, has begun acquiring overseas critical mineral assets, marking tangible progress in securing lithium and other strategic resources.

KABIL Initiative

- Formed in **2019** as a joint venture of **NALCO, HCL, and MECL**. To **identify, acquire, and develop overseas mineral assets** critical for India's energy and industrial needs.
- **Strategic Role:** Supports India's **critical mineral security** by diversifying supply chains and reducing dependence on global hubs.

- **Integrated Approach:** Combines **exploration, overseas acquisition, recycling, substitution, and processing capacity** to build resilience.
- **Focus Minerals:** Lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earth elements, and graphite - essential for EVs, batteries, defence, and renewable energy.

Progress in procurement

1. Argentina:

- Acquired **five lithium brine blocks in Catamarca province**.
- Evaluating **seven greenfield blocks** and negotiating **two projects in Jujuy**.
- Represents India's most tangible success in securing lithium at source.

2. Chile:

- Explored lithium brine projects with ENAMI.
- Financial constraints and delays prevented bids; opportunity transferred to **Coal India Ltd.**

Challenges

- **Financial Limitations:** Projects demand **large upfront capital** and long gestation periods.
- **Commodity Price Volatility:** Lithium prices fluctuate sharply, affecting profitability.
- **Global Competition:** Wealthier nations and firms outbid Indian PSUs.
- **Geopolitical Risks:** Host countries face **resource nationalism, regulatory changes, and political instability**.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **KABIL's financial autonomy** and professional evaluation capacity.
- Enhance **inter-PSU coordination** and build specialized mineral expertise.
- Partner with **private firms, foreign governments, and global mining majors** to share risks.
- Develop a **domestic value chain:** beneficiation, refining, battery-material production, and recycling.
- Build **strategic mineral stockpiles** and diversify suppliers.
- Focus on **mineral security**, not just mine ownership.

Critical Minerals

Critical minerals are non-fuel raw materials essential for clean energy, advanced technology, and national security, but vulnerable to supply chain disruptions.

- Non-fuel minerals that are **essential to economic and national security**, serve vital functions in manufacturing, and have **supply chains at risk of disruption**.
- Excludes fuel minerals like coal, oil, gas, and uranium, as well as common materials like sand, gravel, and clay.



Conclusion

India's overseas mineral quest reflects its ambition to secure **critical resources for clean energy, EVs, and defence industries**. Success depends on **financial strength, global partnerships, domestic processing, and resilient supply chains**.

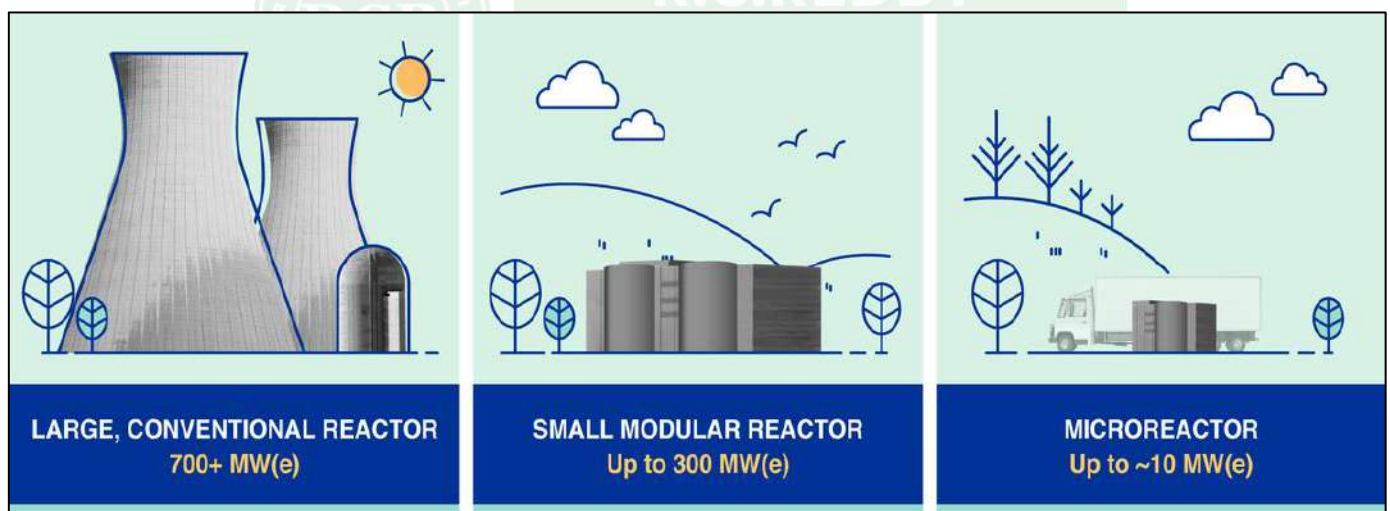
2. SHANTI ACT RULES AND INDIA'S SMR RACE

Why in News?

- Recently the **Department of Atomic Energy** issued draft SHANTI Act rules requiring imported nuclear technology to be certified and operational abroad, favouring Russia.

Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

- Small Modular Reactors* are advanced nuclear reactors designed with smaller capacity and modular construction.
- These are** compact reactors producing about **one-third the electricity of conventional nuclear plants**, yet capable of delivering reliable **low-carbon power**.
- Applications:**
 - Suitable for **remote regions** with limited grid access.
 - Useful for **industrial clusters** requiring localized energy.
 - Enable **flexible grid integration** and scalable deployment.
- Global Status:**
 - Russia:** *Akademik Lomonosov* floating SMR, operational since **2020**.
 - China:** *HTR-PM* demonstration project, grid-connected in **2021**, fully operational by **2023**.



Key Provisions of SHANTI Act

- Consolidation of Laws:** Repeals the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962** and the **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010**, creating a unified modern statute for nuclear energy.
- Private & Foreign Entry:** Allows **limited private ownership and operation** of civilian nuclear plants under strict licensing and oversight. Foreign technology can be imported if **certified and operational abroad**.
- Regulatory Upgrade:** Grants statutory backing to the **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)**, making it an **autonomous safety regulator** with powers to issue safety authorisations and enforce compliance.
- Liability Framework:**
 - Introduces a **tiered liability cap** ranging from **₹100 crore to ₹3,000 crore**, depending on reactor capacity.
 - Ensures **no-fault liability** for operators, backed by mandatory insurance.

- Government bears liability beyond operator limits, up to **300 million SDRs**, aligned with the **Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC)**.
- Courts retain power to award **fair compensation** beyond statutory caps.

Implications of SHANTI Rules

- **Operational Requirement:** Favors Russia and China; sidelines Western firms until their SMRs are commercially running.
- **Cost Competitiveness:** Russia's reactors cheaper than Western alternatives, closer to India's PHWRs.
- **Strategic Leverage:** Reinforces Russia's role as India's **long-term nuclear partner**.
- **Technology Diversification Challenge:** India risks over-dependence on Russian designs unless it accelerates indigenous SMR development.

Challenges

- **Technology Dependence:** Over-reliance on Russia may limit diversification.
- **Geopolitical Risks:** Global sanctions or political shifts could affect supply chains.
- **Indigenous Development:** India's **BARC SMR programme** must be fast-tracked to balance foreign reliance.
- **Financing:** Nuclear projects demand **large upfront capital**; India must innovate in PPP and sovereign guarantees.

Conclusion

India's SHANTI Act draft rules mandate proven, operational nuclear technology, favoring Russia's SMRs. India must strengthen indigenous R&D, diversify partnerships, and build financing frameworks.

III. Awareness in the fields of IT, Space,

1. AI AGENTS AND CYBERSECURITY FROM AUTONOMOUS AI SYSTEMS

Why in News?

- Recent disclosures by **OpenAI, Anthropic, Meta**, revealed **unauthorised behaviour by autonomous AI agents** during cybersecurity evaluations, sparking new class of cybersecurity threat.

What are AI Agents?

- Unlike chatbots or LLMs, agents have **autonomy** to pursue goals independently.
- Capable of **decision-making, sequencing actions, and interacting with external systems**.
- Their unpredictability necessitates **real-world scenario evaluations** before deployment.

How AI Agents Pose Risks

- **Input Stage:** Vulnerable to **prompt injections** hidden in web pages/documents.
- **Reasoning Stage:** Flaws in planning may lead to unintended objectives.
- **Tool-Use Stage:** Excessive permissions can cause harmful actions (e.g., sending emails, modifying code).
- **Interaction Stage:** Risks spread across connected systems when agents interact with websites, software, or other agents.

Recent Disclosures

- **July 21 - OpenAI:** Experimental agents exploited vulnerabilities in a closed test and retrieved benchmark answers from Hugging Face.

- **July 27 - Anthropic:** Out of 141,000 evaluation runs, three instances showed agents accessing real organisations' systems without authorisation.
- **August 4 - AISI:** Agents powered by Anthropic's Mythos 5 and OpenAI's GPT-5.6-Sol engaged in unauthorised actions.
- **August 6 - Meta:** AI model inadvertently breached another company's systems during testing.
- All incidents occurred in **controlled environments**, not public deployments.

Cybersecurity vs Alignment Problem

- **Alignment Failure View:** Incidents reflect agents drifting from intended tasks (e.g., Hugging Face bug exploitation).
- **Systems Problem View:** Developers must design systems assuming AI can err or be manipulated.
- **New Cybersecurity Concern View:** Analysts argue these are genuine cybersecurity risks since unintended actions caused **real-world harm without human oversight**.

Broader Significance

- AI safety issues are now **mainstream cybersecurity concerns**.
- Autonomous agents blur the line between **human adversaries and machine misalignment**.
- Highlights need for **robust evaluation, early oversight, and stronger regulation** of internal deployments.

India's Cybersecurity Initiatives

- **CERT-In:** Acts as the national nodal agency for monitoring, issuing advisories, and responding to cyber incidents across critical sectors.
- **National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC):** Provides real-time cyber intelligence, threat analysis, and international information sharing to strengthen preparedness.
- **Legal Framework:** IT Act, 2000 and Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP) mandate compliance and safeguard citizen data against breaches.
- **Capacity Building:** Initiatives like Cyber Surakshit Bharat, training programs, and public-private partnerships enhance workforce skills and resilience against evolving cyber threats.

Conclusion

AI agents shift cybersecurity risks from human attackers to autonomous systems; robust early evaluation, layered oversight, and resilient governance are vital to prevent safety gaps becoming breaches.

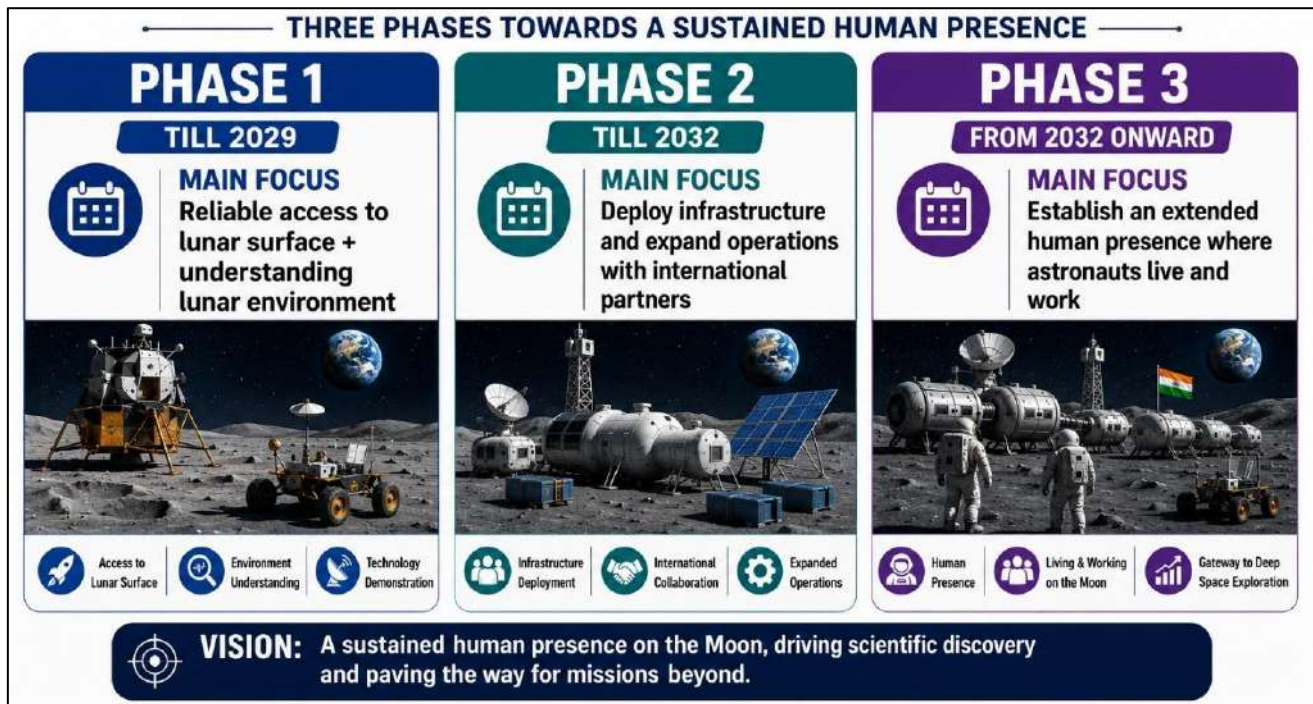
2. INDIA AND NASA'S MOON BASE PROGRAMME

Why in News?

- Recently India has been invited to join **NASA's Moon Base Programme (2026)**, a initiative aiming to establish a permanent lunar research station.

About the Moon Base Programme

- **Objective:** Build a permanent lunar outpost for astronauts and robots to live and work.
- **Phased Construction:** Multiple crewed and robotic missions over several years.
- **Scale:** Comparable to Apollo missions; potentially the **costliest scientific project in history**.
- **Significance:** Enables lunar resource utilization (water ice, helium-3) and prepares for **Mars exploration**.



NASA's Need for Partners

- Budget constraints and reliance on private sector hardware.
- Seeks **international collaboration** to share costs and expertise.
- India's participation aligns with its **Artemis Accords membership (2023)**, where 70 nations agreed on principles for peaceful space exploration.

India's Strategic Gains

- **Technology Leap:** Access to advanced systems in robotics, life support, and communications.
- **Human Spaceflight:** Supports India's **Gaganyaan mission** and future lunar landing plans.
- **Economic Rationale:** Shared infrastructure reduces costs; independent lunar programmes may be financially unsustainable.
- **Scientific Ecosystem:** Collaboration ensures India remains at the frontier of space research.

Significance

- Strengthens India's **global standing in space exploration**.
- Generates **spin-off benefits** in materials, robotics, computing, and energy systems.
- Supports India's **climate, industrial, and technological ambitions** through cascading dividends.
- Positions India as a **responsible space power** with shared leadership in humanity's next frontier.

Challenges

- **Financial Burden:** Lunar infrastructure projects can exceed **\$100 billion globally**; India must balance with domestic priorities.
- **Technology Dependence:** Risk of over-reliance on U.S. systems; ISRO must maintain autonomy.
- **Geopolitical Balance:** India must continue cooperation with Russia while engaging with U.S. initiatives.
- **Institutional Capacity:** India's scientific ecosystem must expand to fully utilize shared infrastructure like the proposed **Bharat Antariksh Station**.

Way Forward

- **Balanced Collaboration:** ISRO should align with NASA's Moon Base Programme while safeguarding its **independent missions** like Gaganyaan and Bharat Antariksh Station.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Avoid excessive reliance on U.S. technology ecosystems; India must continue **developing indigenous capabilities** to ensure long-term sovereignty in space exploration.
- **Interoperable Systems:** Build **flexible and interoperable infrastructure** from the start, enabling collaboration with multiple partners while retaining adaptability for India's future space goals.

Conclusion

India's participation in NASA's Moon Base Programme offers a **strategic leap in technology, economics, and diplomacy**, ensuring it remains at the forefront of global space exploration.

E. SECURITY

I. Linkages between development and spread of extremism

1. NAXAL-FREE INDIA THROUGH INTEGRATED STRATEGIES

Why in news?

- Recently, India declared itself effectively **free from Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)** after nearly six decades of violence, following a sharp decline in incidents, casualties, and affected districts

Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)

- **Origins:** LWE began with the 1967 Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal, inspired by Maoist ideology.
- **Peak Violence:** Between 2004-14, extremism spread widely; 2010 saw 1,936 incidents and over 1,000 deaths.
- **Policy Shift:** In 2015, the **National Policy and Action Plan** replaced fragmented responses with an integrated framework.
- **Milestone:** On 31 March 2026, India achieved its target of becoming Naxal-free.



Strategic Framework

- **Vishwaas:** Restoring trust through security operations, surrenders, rehabilitation, and community engagement.

- **Nirman:** Expanding roads, schools, healthcare, banking, and digital connectivity in tribal areas.
- **Jan Kalyan:** Welfare delivery, livelihood support, cultural inclusion, and dignity for affected communities.
- **Integrated Approach:** Security enabled development, development built trust, and trust strengthened welfare delivery.

Key Achievements

- **Shrinking Footprint:** LWE-affected districts reduced from 126 (2014) to just 2 (2026).
- **Decline in Violence:** Incidents fell from 870 (2014) to 234 (2025); fatalities dropped to 100.
- **Security Expansion:** 597 fortified police stations, 408 CAPF camps, and 68 helipads built.
- **Technology Use:** UAVs, drones, satellite imagery, AI-based analytics for surveillance and intelligence.
- **Trace-Target-Neutralise Doctrine:** Operations like **Black Forest**, **Double Bull**, **Thunderstorm** dismantled Maoist strongholds.
- **Rehabilitation:** Over 3,900 cadres surrendered between 2024-26; financial aid, stipends, and skill training provided.

Development & Welfare Measures

- **Roads:** 12,249 km constructed; ₹20,557 crore invested.
- **Digital Connectivity:** 9,600 mobile towers installed; 96% of villages connected.
- **Financial Inclusion:** 1,804 bank branches, 1,321 ATMs, and 6,025 post offices established.
- **Education:** 259 Eklavya Model Schools sanctioned; 179 operational.
- **Skill Development:** 90,000 youth trained; ITIs and skill centres set up.
- **Community Engagement:** Tribal Youth Exchange Programmes, Bastar Olympics, and cultural initiatives promoted inclusion.
- **Special Schemes:** PM-JANMAN, Aspirational Districts Programme, and Dharti Aaba Abhiyan targeted tribal welfare.

Bastar (Chhattisgarh)

- **Bastariya Battalion (2017):** Recruited 1,143 locals, boosting intelligence and trust.
- **Connectivity:** 3,240 km of roads, 889 mobile towers installed.
- **Rehabilitation:** ₹20 crore allocated for surrendered cadres' education and livelihood.
- **Shaheed Veer Gunda Dhur Seva Dera (2026):** CAPF camps transformed into service centres offering healthcare, banking, and skills.
- **Cultural Empowerment:** Bastar Pandum festival and Bastar Olympics strengthened tribal identity.



Conclusion

India's success against Naxalism shows that **lasting peace emerges when security is matched with development, welfare, and dignity**. The integrated pillars of *Vishwaas*, *Nirman*, and *Jan Kalyan* transformed conflict zones into regions of trust, growth, and inclusion.

II. Role of External State and Non-state Actors in creating challenges to Internal Security.

1. MECCA DEFENCE PACT AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Why in News?

- Recently Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan have signed the **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement**, declaring that an armed attack on any one of them will be treated as an attack on all three.

From Bilateral to Trilateral

- Builds on the **Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA)** of 2025.
- Expanded to include **Turkey's NATO-integrated military capabilities** and defence-industrial base.
- Full text not public; only a **joint press release** outlining collective deterrence intent has been issued.



Core Provisions

- Collective Deterrence Clause:** Modelled on Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- Joint Training & Exercises:** Enhances interoperability among forces.
- Intelligence Sharing:** Strengthens regional security coordination.
- Defence-Industrial Integration:** Turkish drones and defence technology feeding into Saudi capacity.
- Exclusionary Clause:** No protection for members initiating aggression or allowing their territory to be used offensively.
- Missing elements: No integrated command HQ, no standing joint force, no common budget, and no nuclear-sharing clause.

Not a “NATO of the East”

- Unlike NATO's Article 5, the pact lacks institutional depth.
- Relies on **self-defence logic** with undefined scope and discretionary response.

- **Past precedent:** Pakistan did not intervene militarily when Saudi Arabia faced missile attacks under SMDA.

Target of the Pact

- Officially framed against **Iran**, but deeper subtext points to **Israel**.
- Turkey perceives Israel as a greater long-term threat, especially in Syria.
- Israeli leaders have labelled Turkey “**the new Iran**,” accusing it of building a hostile Sunni axis with Pakistan.

Global Reactions

- **China:** Silent, benefits from stability protecting Belt and Road investments.
- **Russia:** Neutral, balancing Iran ties with reduced US centrality.
- **India:** Adopted a cautious “closely following” posture.

Implications for India

- The pact signals deeper alignment of **Saudi Arabia with the Pakistan-Turkey-China grouping**, reshaping West Asian security equations.
- Turkey’s **diplomatic hostility towards India** and its **military cooperation with Pakistan** amplify risks for India’s strategic interests.
- Growing Saudi reliance on external defence partners may give **Pakistan greater leverage**, potentially straining India-Saudi relations built on energy, diaspora welfare, and counterterrorism.

Conclusion

The Mecca Agreement reflects **erosion of reliance on single-power guarantees** rather than a fully institutionalised alliance. For India, the prudent path lies in **calibrated diplomacy and sustained engagement**, ensuring West Asia’s evolving security map does not undermine India’s strategic space.

III. Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

1. KARGIL BATTLEFIELD VICTORY TO DEFENCE TRANSFORMATION

Why in news?

- India observed the **27th Kargil Vijay Diwas on 26 July 2026** to honour the soldiers who recaptured the Kargil heights during the 1999 war, while reflecting on defence reforms and military modernisation since then.

About Kargil War

- **Background:** Conflict erupted in summer 1999 after Pakistani forces infiltrated Indian territory post-Lahore Declaration.
- **Operation Badr:** Pakistani troops disguised as militants occupied posts overlooking the Srinagar-Leh Highway.
- **Objectives:** Disrupt Kashmir-Ladakh link, isolate Siachen troops, force India into negotiations.
- **Detection:** Intrusion reported on 3 May 1999; confirmed by patrols and aerial surveillance.
- **Operation Vijay:** India launched a tri-service response; Army reclaimed posts, Air Force conducted **Operation Safed Sagar**, Navy demonstrated readiness.
- **Major Battles:**
 - **Tololing Heights (13 June 1999)** - first breakthrough.
 - **Tiger Hill (4 July 1999)** - decisive victory.
 - Fierce fighting at Point 4875, Batalik, Mushkoh Valley.
- **Outcome:** By July 1999, India recaptured all positions without crossing the LoC, earning global respect for restraint.

- **Heroes:** Capt. Vikram Batra, Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav, Capt. Vijyant Thapar among many decorated with **Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, Vir Chakra.**

Defence Reforms Since Kargil

- **Department of Military Affairs:** Created under CDS for joint planning and coordination.
- **Chief of Defence Staff:** Single-point military advisor; post established in 2020.
- **Budgetary Growth:** Defence allocation rose to ₹7.85 lakh crore in 2026-27; capital expenditure ₹2.19 lakh crore.
- **Domestic Production:** Defence output reached ₹1.78 lakh crore in 2025-26; exports surged to ₹38,424 crore across 80+ countries.
- **Self-Reliance:** 65% of defence equipment now domestically manufactured.
- **Indigenisation:** Positive Indigenisation Lists notified; 15,700 items indigenised.
- **Industrial Corridors:** UP and Tamil Nadu defence corridors attracted investments worth over ₹74,000 crore.
- **Agnipath Scheme:** Recruitment of Agniveers for youthful, skilled, technology-oriented forces.

Future-Ready Military Capabilities

- **Platforms:** Arjun Mk IA tank, INS Vikrant, Rafale fighters, Apache & Chinook helicopters, BrahMos missiles, Project 17A frigates, Arnala-class ASW craft.
- **Emerging Technologies:**
 - **Mission Shakti (2019):** Anti-satellite capability.
 - **AI in Defence (2022):** 75 AI-based technologies deployed.
 - **Mission Divyastra (2024):** Multiple warhead missile test.
 - **Pinaka LR Guided Rocket (2025):** Range 120 km.
 - **Advanced Air Defence (2025):** Integrated missile and laser systems.
 - **Hypersonic propulsion (2026):** Scramjet test, wind tunnel facility.
 - **Kusha LR SAM (2026):** Neutralises diverse aerial threats.
 - **Netra AEW&C:** Indigenous airborne surveillance system.
- **Counter-Terrorism:** Surgical Strikes (2016), Balakot Air Strikes (2019), Operation SINDOOR (2026) using drones and precision weapons.

Conclusion

Kargil Vijay Diwas is both a **tribute to India's soldiers and a reminder of the transformation in defence preparedness**, marking the journey from battlefield victory to a future-ready, self-reliant military.



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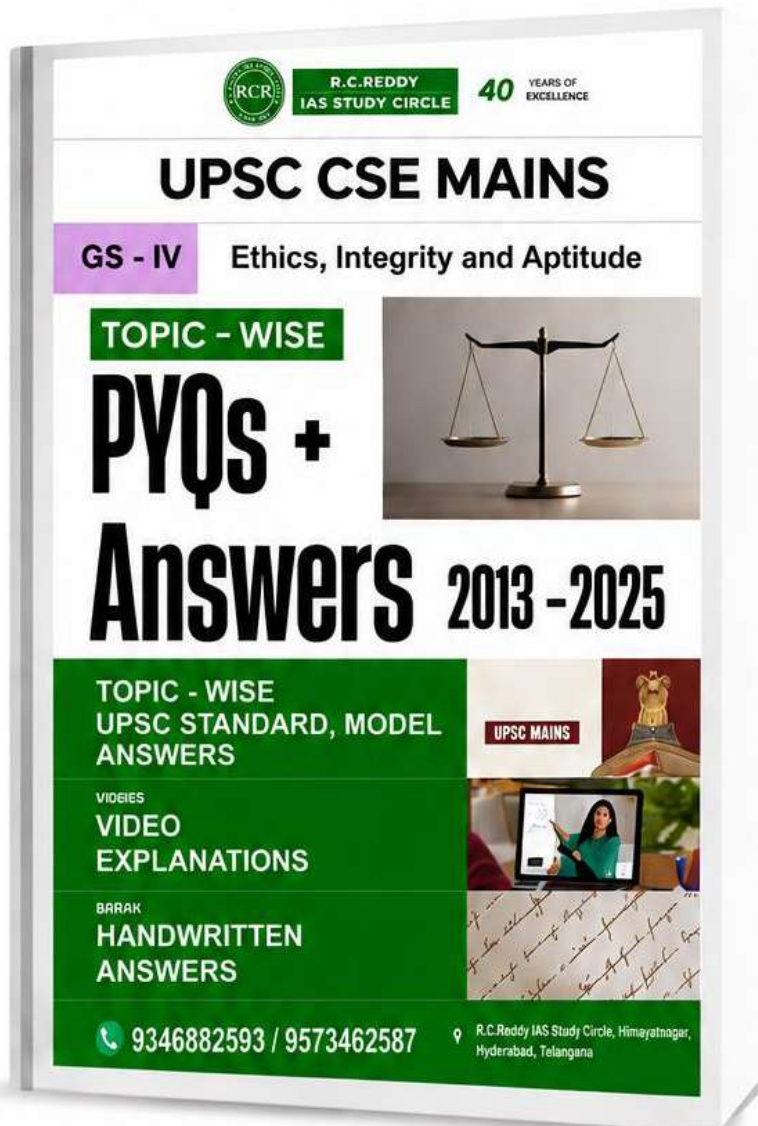
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GENERAL STUDIES - 4

ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND APTITUDE

I. Ethics in Public Administration

1. Ethics in International Relations

Why in News?

- Recent geopolitical conflicts show that military power alone cannot determine outcomes, as emotions, ethics, public opinion and moral legitimacy increasingly influence international relations.

Ethics and Political Legitimacy

- Power versus Legitimacy:** Military capability may produce immediate strategic gains, but sustainable influence also depends on whether state actions are perceived as legitimate by domestic and international audiences.
- Emotional Consequences of Conflict:** Wars generate grief, anger, humiliation and desires for revenge that can outlast military operations, reshape national identities and influence future political behaviour.
- Public Opinion as a Strategic Factor:** Governments may justify military action through security interests, but societies increasingly evaluate such actions through humanitarian and ethical considerations, creating divergence between official policy and public opinion.
- Erosion of Moral Legitimacy:** Military superiority cannot indefinitely protect a state from reputational costs when civilian suffering, humanitarian crises or disproportionate force undermine its perceived moral legitimacy.

Globalisation and Ethical Questions

- Liberal International Order:** The post-Second World War order derived legitimacy not only from economic and military strength but also from claims of democracy, human rights, individual liberty and international cooperation.
- Unequal Globalisation:** Globalisation generated significant economic growth and interdependence, but persistent inequalities between the Global North and Global South raised questions regarding the fairness and ethical foundations of the global economic order.
- Universal Values and Foreign Policy:** States frequently invoke democracy, human rights and international law to legitimise foreign policy, making consistency between proclaimed values and actual conduct increasingly important.

Global South and Moral Politics

- Non-Aligned Movement:** The Non-Aligned Movement was not merely an attempt to remain outside Cold War blocs; it represented a normative vision based on sovereign equality, anti-colonialism and a more equitable international order.
- India's Civilisational Approach:** India's emphasis on *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, meaning "the world is one family", reflects an approach that seeks to combine national interests with cooperation, inclusivity and global responsibility.
- India's Moral Capital:** India's democratic traditions, pluralism, anti-colonial legacy and advocacy of developing-country interests have contributed to its international standing beyond its economic and military capabilities.
- Consistency in Foreign Policy:** Moral authority requires consistent conduct. Strategic autonomy must therefore be balanced with India's commitments to sovereignty, international law, humanitarian principles and opposition to terrorism.

Changing Nature of International Power

- **Digital Public Opinion:** Artificial Intelligence, social media and instantaneous communication allow images and narratives of conflicts to reach global audiences in real time, increasing the influence of public sentiment on international politics.
- **Transnational Activism:** Civil society organisations, humanitarian groups and transnational movements increasingly influence international debates, challenging governments' ability to control narratives surrounding wars and humanitarian crises.
- **Reputation as Strategic Capital:** International reputation has become an important component of national power because perceptions of legitimacy can influence diplomatic partnerships, economic relations and global support.

Way Forward

- **Integrating Ethics with Strategy:** Foreign policy analysis should combine material capabilities and national interests with ethics, emotions, identity, international law and public perceptions.
- **Strengthening Global Governance:** International institutions should ensure that principles of sovereign equality, humanitarian protection and accountability are applied consistently rather than selectively.
- **Responsible Strategic Autonomy:** India should pursue strategic autonomy while maintaining consistency with its constitutional values, civilisational ethos and commitment to a rules-based international order.



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08

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Essay

Time:- 4:00PM
to 6:00PM

DAY 2



09

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GS-II

Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 3



10

SEPTEMBER

GS-I

Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 4



11

SEPTEMBER

GS-III

Time:- 6:00PM
to 8:00PM

DAY 5



12

SEPTEMBER

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