



Weekly Current Affairs

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Corporate Office

2nd Floor, Apsara Arcade, Karol Bagh Metro Station Gate No. 6,
New Delhi 110005

17A/41, 1st Floor, WEA Karol Bagh, New Delhi 110005

706 1st Floor Dr. Mukherjee Nagar Near Batra Cinema Delhi -
110009

C 59 Noida Sector 2, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301

Phone: 08448440231

Email: info@plutusias.com

Web: www.plutusias.com



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INDIA-EU RELATIONS: NAVIGATING A NEW ERA OF COLLABORATION

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The second meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) took place in New Delhi. It was co-chaired on the Indian side by India's External Affairs Minister, Dr S. Jaishankar; Commerce and Industry Minister Shri Piyush Goyal; and Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw. Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy Ms. Henna Virkkunen, Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency Mr. Maros Šefčovič and Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation Ms Ekaterina Zaharieva co-chaired on the EU side.



EVOLUTIONS OF BILATERAL TIES

- 1. Early Engagement (1950s-1990s):** Diplomatic ties began in the 1960s, with an initial focus on development cooperation and trade. Relations were limited but gradually expanding.
- 2. Formal Partnership (2000s):** The EU-India Strategic Partnership was established in 2004, focusing on political, economic, and cultural cooperation. This period also saw the start of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations in 2007, deepening economic ties.
- 3. Strategic Convergence (2010-2020):** Both sides recognized shared global challenges, leading to stronger cooperation in areas like climate change, security, and sustainable development. The India-EU Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008)

and increased collaboration in sectors like counter-terrorism, trade, and environmental sustainability were notable achievements.

- 4. TTC and Recent Developments (2022-Present):** The launch of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) in 2022 marked a significant step in addressing emerging challenges in trade, technology, and security. Cooperation on AI, semiconductors, digital infrastructure, and clean technologies expanded. The relationship now includes joint efforts on sustainable growth, resilient supply chains, and multilateral diplomacy.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

- 1. Trade and Investment:** Focus on reducing trade barriers, promoting investment, and negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).
- 2. Technology and Innovation:** Cooperation on AI, 6G, semiconductors, and digital infrastructure, with a focus on ethical AI and technological innovation.
- 3. Clean and Green Technologies:** Joint efforts on climate change, renewable energy, battery recycling, and waste-to-hydrogen technologies.
- 4. Security and Geopolitics:** Collaboration on cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and regional security, with a shared commitment to multilateral diplomacy.
- 5. Agriculture and Food Security:** Research on climate-resilient agriculture and food security solutions.
- 6. Health and Pharmaceuticals:** Enhancing API supply chains and promoting sustainable pharmaceutical practices.
- 7. Education and Skills Development:** Talent exchange, bridging the digital skills gap, and fostering professional development.
- 8. Multilateral Cooperation:** Strengthening the WTO, implementing the Global Digital Compact, and promoting international cooperation.

- 9. Resilient Supply Chains:** Developing secure and diversified supply chains in technology, clean energy, and pharmaceuticals.

IMPORTANCE OF EU FOR INDIA

- 1. Trade and Economic Relations:** The EU is India's largest trading partner after China, supporting exports and offering significant FDI. Ongoing FTA negotiations aim to enhance trade and economic ties.
- 2. Technology and Innovation:** The EU collaborates with India in areas like AI, digital infrastructure, and clean energy, aiding technological advancement and R&D.
- 3. Climate and Sustainability:** The EU is a key partner in promoting renewable energy, sustainable practices, and green technologies, helping India meet its climate goals.
- 4. Security and Geopolitics:** The EU supports India's security interests, especially in the Indo-Pacific, and aids in counter-terrorism, cyber security, and global stability.
- 5. Cultural and Educational Ties:** Shared democratic values strengthen people-to-people connections, while educational exchanges foster skills development and research collaboration.
- 6. Multilateral Cooperation:** India and the EU work together on global issues, including trade reform, UN SDGs, and sustainable growth.
- 7. Strategic Partnership:** Both sides share strategic interests in shaping global governance, trade, and security, reinforced by initiatives like the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC).

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA FOR EU

- 1. Enhancing Trade Relations:** Concluding the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the EU will help reduce trade barriers, improve market access, and foster stronger economic ties.
- 2. Deepening Technological Cooperation:** Expanding collaboration in high-tech areas like

AI, digital infrastructure, and cybersecurity will help both sides benefit from technological advancements and foster innovation.

- 3. Joint Initiatives on Climate Change:** Strengthening partnerships on renewable energy, sustainable development, and green technologies can help both India and the EU meet their climate goals and address environmental concerns.
- 4. Promoting Investment and Business Partnerships:** Addressing issues like intellectual property rights, investment protection, and ease of doing business can increase EU investments in India, benefiting both economies.
- 5. Collaboration on Global Governance:** Working together on multilateral issues, such as WTO reform, global digital governance, and UN Security Council reforms, will ensure a strong collective voice on global challenges.
- 6. People-to-People Exchanges:** Expanding educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and tourism can foster deeper mutual understanding, strengthening long-term ties between India and the EU.

AREAS OF CONCERN

- 1. Economic Partnership:** India is a major trade partner, offering a growing market for EU goods while benefiting from EU exports in machinery, chemicals, and automobiles.
- 2. Geopolitical Role:** India plays a key role in regional stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, and is vital for the EU's security and global governance efforts.
- 3. Shared Values:** Both share democratic values, strengthening cooperation on issues like human rights, climate change, and the rule of law.
- 4. Climate Action:** India's role in global climate efforts makes it crucial for the EU's green transition and sustainability goals.
- 5. Cultural Ties:** Growing cultural exchanges and educational partnerships deepen people-to-

people connections.

WAY TO FURTHER COOPERATION

- 1. Trade Barriers:** High tariffs and regulatory challenges still hinder smooth trade between India and the EU.
- 2. Investment Climate:** Concerns over intellectual property rights and ease of doing business in India may deter EU investments.
- 3. Regulatory Differences:** Divergence in standards and certifications complicates trade in sectors like pharmaceuticals and food safety.
- 4. Geopolitical Differences:** India's geopolitical stance, especially regarding Russia and China, may sometimes conflict with EU policies.
- 5. Environmental Standards:** India's development priorities might clash with the EU's environmental expectations.

CONCLUSION

India-EU relations are steadily evolving, with key areas of cooperation spanning trade, technology, climate action, and security. The India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) has proven to be a vital platform for addressing emerging challenges and fostering collaboration in areas such as AI, clean energy, digital infrastructure, and resilient supply chains. By addressing concerns like trade barriers, regulatory differences, and geopolitical tensions, both sides can further enhance their strategic partnership, promoting mutual growth and global stability. Moreover, strengthening multilateral cooperation and aligning efforts on issues like climate change, digital governance, and global trade reforms will ensure that India and the EU can effectively navigate the evolving global geopolitical landscape.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. With reference to the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), consider the following statements:

1. The first meeting of the TTC was held in New Delhi in February 2025.
2. The TTC was established to address challenges at the intersection of trade, technology, and security.
3. The second meeting of the TTC took place in Brussels in November 2023.

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the significance of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) in strengthening bilateral relations. How can it contribute to global economic stability?

(250 words, 15 marks)

UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS: INDIA'S JOURNEY TOWARDS JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The NHRC, in collaboration with the MEA, is hosting a six-day ITEC Executive Capacity Building Programme on human rights in New Delhi for officials from 14 Global South countries. The programme, inaugurated by Justice V. Ramasubramanian, aims to enhance collaboration, share experiences, and strengthen human rights protection mechanisms. It includes lectures, interactive sessions, and field visits. This initiative underscores India's commitment to South-South cooperation and leadership in global human rights diplomacy.

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible rights that every individual is entitled to, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. These rights are outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

The key features of human rights :

1. Universality – They apply to all individuals equally.
2. Inalienability – They cannot be taken away except in extreme situations.
3. Indivisibility – No right is superior to another.
4. Interdependence – All rights are interconnected.

Examples of Human Rights:

1. Right to life, liberty, and security (Article 3 of UDHR)
2. Freedom of speech and expression (Article 19 of UDHR)
3. Right to education (Article 26 of UDHR)
4. Freedom from torture and degrading treatment (Article 5 of UDHR)

HUMAN RIGHTS VS. FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Aspect	Human Rights	Fundamental Rights (India)
Definition	Universal rights recognized internationally	Rights granted under the Indian Constitution
Source	UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, International Treaties	Part III of the Indian Constitution
Applicability	Global	Applicable to Indian citizens and, in some cases, non-citizens
Enforcement	Enforced by the UN, international bodies, NHRC	Enforceable by Indian courts (Article 32 and 226)
Nature	Broader in scope	Specific and legally binding in India
Example	Right to clean water, climate justice	Right to Equality (Article 14), Right to Freedom (Article 19)

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIA

The Indian Constitution incorporates several provisions to protect and promote human rights:

1. Fundamental Rights (Part III)

1. **Article 14** – Right to Equality
2. **Article 19** – Freedom of Speech and Expression
3. **Article 21** – Right to Life and Personal Liberty
4. **Article 23 & 24** – Protection against Human Trafficking and Child Labor

2. Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)

1. **Article 39(a)** – Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid
2. **Article 41** – Right to Work, Education, and Public Assistance

3. **Article 47** – Improvement of Public Health

3. Other Legal Provisions Supporting Human Rights

1. **The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993** – Establishes NHRC
2. **Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**
3. **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015** – Protection of children’s rights

ROLE OF NHRC IN UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIA

1. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Act. Its key functions include:

2. Investigation of Human Rights Violations – NHRC takes suo moto cognizance of cases involving police brutality, custodial deaths, and discrimination.
3. Advisory Role – NHRC provides recommendations to the government on policy reforms.
4. Judicial Interventions – The NHRC has intervened in landmark cases such as Manoj Sinha v. State of UP, where it addressed custodial torture.
5. Human Rights Awareness Programs – Conducts training and awareness campaigns.
6. Monitoring International Treaties – Ensures India's compliance with global human rights conventions.
7. Protecting Vulnerable Groups – Focuses on the rights of women, children, and marginalized communities.
8. Annual and Special Reports – Submits findings to the government and Parliament.

KEY CASES HANDLED BY NHRC:

1. 2006 Salwa Judum Case – NHRC intervened in addressing human rights violations by state-backed militia in Chhattisgarh.
2. 2004 Manipur Encounter Killings – NHRC recommended action against extrajudicial killings by security forces.
3. 2019 Hyderabad Encounter Case – Examined police accountability in extrajudicial killings.
4. 2021 Farmers' Protest Human Rights Concerns – Took cognizance of complaints regarding protestor treatment.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RIGHTS

1. **Custodial Violence & Extra-Judicial Killings:** Cases like the Hyderabad Encounter (2019) and Manipur Fake Encounter Case (2012) highlight police excesses. NHRC reported 1,731 custodial deaths in 2019-20. The lack of police accountability mechanisms exacerbates the issue.
2. **Freedom of Expression Restrictions:** Sedition Law (Section 124A IPC) and Unlawful Activities

(Prevention) Act (UAPA) are misused to curb dissent. Arrests of journalists and activists raise concerns about press freedom.

3. **Discrimination Against Marginalized Communities:** Caste-based violence continues, as seen in Hathras Case (2020). Discriminatory practices against Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities remain prevalent.
4. **Violation of Women's Rights:** Nirbhaya Case (2012) exposed deep-rooted gender violence. Rising cases of domestic violence and workplace harassment.
5. **Digital Surveillance & Privacy Concerns:** The Pegasus spyware controversy raised concerns over digital privacy. Weak data protection laws put citizens' privacy at risk.
6. **Refugee Crisis & Statelessness:** The Rohingya refugee issue poses humanitarian concerns. Citizenship debates, such as those related to NRC and CAA, create uncertainty.
7. **Environmental and Indigenous Rights Violations:** Large-scale deforestation and displacement due to industrial projects. Weak enforcement of environmental protection laws affects vulnerable communities.

WAYS TO PROTECT & STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS

1. **Strengthening Legal Framework:** Reforms in sedition laws and UAPA to ensure fair trials. Implementation of police reforms to prevent custodial violence.
2. **Judicial & Institutional Strengthening:** Expanding NHRC's powers and ensuring its recommendations are binding. Strengthening State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs).
3. **Awareness & Education:** Introducing human rights education in schools. Media role in highlighting human rights violations.
4. **Technology for Transparency:** Use of CCTV in police stations to prevent custodial torture. Digital platforms for lodging human rights complaints.
5. **Global Cooperation:** Aligning India's human

rights policies with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strengthening partnerships with international human rights organizations.

CONCLUSION

Human rights are the cornerstone of a just and democratic society. While India has made significant strides in upholding human rights through constitutional provisions and institutions like NHRC, challenges persist. Strengthening legal mechanisms, ensuring institutional accountability, and fostering a culture of human rights awareness are crucial steps toward a more just society. By promoting and safeguarding human rights, India can continue to uphold its democratic ethos and global commitments.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. Which of the following rights are considered as both Fundamental Rights under the Indian Constitution and Human Rights under international law?

1. Right to Equality
2. Right to Education
3. Right to a Healthy Environment
4. Right to Freedom of Expression

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the constitutional and legal provisions that safeguard human rights in India. How do the Directive Principles of State Policy complement Fundamental Rights in ensuring human dignity? (250 words, 15 marks)

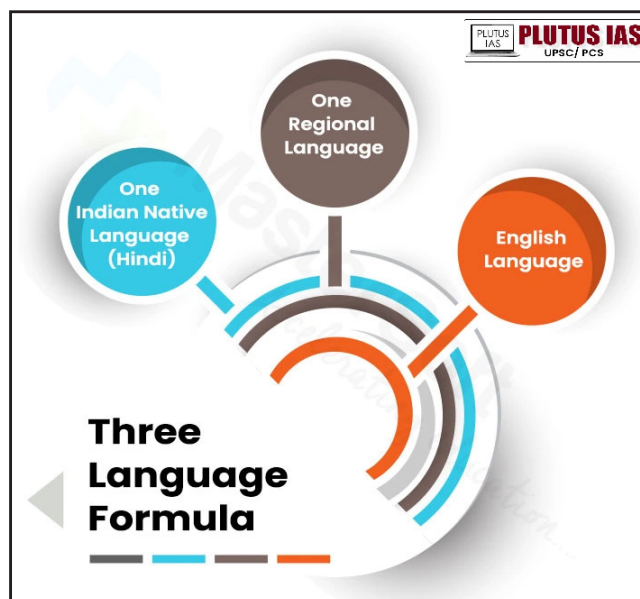
THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA: TIGHT ROPE WALK FOR UNION GOVERNMENT

WHY IN THE NEWS?

Tensions are rising between the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre over the alleged imposition of Hindi through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The DMK, Tamil Nadu's ruling party, has strongly opposed the policy, vowing never to accept Hindi imposition. In contrast, the Congress, an ally of the DMK, has taken a measured stance, stating that Hindi should be learned by choice, not forced. Congress whip Manickam Tagore criticized the Centre for threatening to withhold funds unless Tamil Nadu accepts the NEP, calling it an "RSS project." He reiterated that Congress supports Tamil Nadu's two-language policy and opposes any language imposition.

WHAT IS THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA?

The Three-Language Formula is an educational policy introduced in the 1968 National Policy on Education (NEP) to promote multilingualism and national integration. It mandates that students in India learn three languages: their regional language (mother tongue), Hindi, and English. NEP 2020 retains this framework but allows states and students flexibility in choosing languages, ensuring at least two are Indian languages.



EVOLUTION OF THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA

Commission/Policy	Year	Key Recommendations Related to Language in Education	Other Language-Related Recommendations
Kothari Commission	1964-66	Recommended the Three-Language Formula: 1. Regional language/mother tongue 2. Hindi (for non-Hindi states) or a modern Indian language (for Hindi-speaking states) 3. English	Emphasized the role of language in national integration. – Suggested improving language teaching methodologies.
National Policy on Education (NPE)	1968	Officially introduced the Three-Language Formula. – Stressed the importance of Hindi and English in national and international communication.	Recommended developing regional languages alongside Hindi and English. – Emphasized preserving linguistic diversity.
National Policy on Education (NPE)	1986	Retained the Three-Language Formula but acknowledged implementation challenges. – Suggested mother-tongue-based primary education.	Encouraged the use of modern Indian languages in education. – Recognized English as an important link language.
Ramamurti Committee	1990	Recommended improving the quality of language teaching. – Suggested using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at all levels.	Advocated for linguistic inclusivity in educational institutions.
Acharya Ramamurti Review Committee	1991	Recommended strengthening the Three-Language Formula. – Stressed better training for language teachers.	Suggested measures to protect linguistic minorities.
National Curriculum Framework (NCF)	2005	Reaffirmed the importance of multilingualism in education. – Focused on bilingual teaching methods.	Highlighted the need for context-based language learning.
National Education Policy (NEP)	2020	Retained the Three-Language Formula with flexibility for states. – Ensured that at least two languages must be Indian languages. – Strong emphasis on mother-tongue-based education.	Encouraged Sanskrit as an optional subject. – No language imposition on any state.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA

- 1. Enhances Multilingual Proficiency:** Boosts cognitive skills, memory, and communication while fostering cultural understanding.
- 2. Promotes National Integration:** Bridges the north-south divide and strengthens unity through linguistic inclusivity.
- 3. Expands Career & Mobility Opportunities:** Improves job prospects and facilitates education and migration across regions.
- 4. Preserves Regional Languages:** Prevents language decline and safeguards linguistic heritage.

5. Encourages Bilingual Education: Supports mother-tongue learning while enhancing proficiency in other languages.

6. Balances Global & Local Needs: Prepares students for international opportunities while preserving cultural identity.

CONCERNS RELATED TO THE THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA:

- 1. Perceived Imposition of Hindi:** Non-Hindi-speaking states, especially Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Karnataka, view it as an attempt to impose Hindi.
- 2. Implementation Challenges:** Many schools lack qualified teachers to effectively teach additional languages.

3. **Increased Academic Burden:** Learning an extra language adds to students' workload, especially those struggling with language acquisition.
4. **Neglect of Foreign Languages:** Emphasis on a third Indian language may limit opportunities to learn global languages like French, German, or Mandarin.
5. **Regional Resistance:** States with strong linguistic identities resist policies perceived as undermining their native language and culture.
6. **Resource Constraints:** State governments often lack funds and infrastructure to implement multilingual education effectively.

RECOMMENDATION TO ADDRESS THE CONCERN REGARDING THREE LANGUAGE FORMULA:

1. **Flexible Language Choice:** Allow states and students greater autonomy in selecting the three languages, ensuring regional preferences are respected.
2. **Strengthening Language Education:** Invest in teacher training and resources to improve multilingual education across states.
3. **Reducing Academic Burden:** Implement gradual language learning with innovative and interactive teaching methods to ease student workload.
4. **Balancing Global & Regional Needs:** Provide students the option to learn foreign languages alongside Indian languages to enhance global opportunities.
5. **Constructive Dialogue:** Encourage cooperation between the Centre and states to address regional concerns while upholding national integration goals.
6. **Adequate Funding & Infrastructure:** Ensure financial and institutional support to facilitate effective implementation, especially in resource-limited states.

CONCLUSION

The Three-Language Formula aims to balance linguistic diversity with national integration, promoting multilingualism without imposing any language. Constructive dialogue and cooperation between the Centre and states are crucial to addressing concerns and ensuring successful implementation. Strengthening language education and providing necessary resources will enhance language learning outcomes while preserving India's rich linguistic heritage.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. With reference to the Three-Language Formula, consider the following statements:

1. The policy was first introduced in the 1986 National Policy on Education.
2. It mandates the compulsory study of Hindi in all states.
3. NEP 2020 allows states flexibility in choosing the languages.

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Answer: A

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the role of language policies in promoting national integration while preserving linguistic diversity. How can India strike a balance between the two? (250 words, 15 marks)

MSME BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE INDIAN ECONOMY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the MSME sector contributes significantly to the country’s economy as a key driver of innovation and growth. He will participate in three Post-budget webinars. These webinars are being held on MSME as an Engine of Growth, Manufacturing, Exports and Nuclear Energy Missions, and Regulatory, Investment and Ease of doing business Reforms. The webinars will provide a collaborative platform for government officials, industry leaders, and trade experts to deliberate on India’s industrial, trade, and energy strategies. The discussions will focus on policy execution, investment facilitation, and technology adoption, ensuring seamless implementation of the Budget’s transformative measures. The webinars will engage private sector experts, industry representatives, and Subject matter specialists to align efforts and drive impactful implementation of Budget announcements.



REVISED DEFINITION OF MSME

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a critical role in India’s economic growth, contributing significantly to GDP, exports, and job creation. Recognising their importance, the government has periodically revised the MSME classification criteria to better reflect the changing business environment and help entrepreneurs access essential benefits such as loans, subsidies, and tax incentives. In the Union Budget 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a major update to the New MSME classification, increasing the investment limit by 2.5 times and doubling the turnover limits. This move is aimed at fostering growth, encouraging innovation, and creating a more enabling ecosystem for MSMEs to flourish. In this article, we will look into the new MSME definition.

Category	Old Investment Limit	Old Turnover Limit	New Investment Limit	New Turnover Limit	Impact
Micro Enterprises	Up to ₹1 crore	Up to ₹5 crore	Up to ₹2.5 crore	Up to ₹10 crore	More businesses qualify as micro-enterprises, better access to government schemes, encourages investment in technology.
Small Enterprises	Up to ₹10 crore	Up to ₹50 crore	Up to ₹25 crore	Up to ₹100 crore	It allows scaling up without immediate reclassification, supports expansion in production and market reach, and provides a longer growth runway.
Medium Enterprises	Up to ₹50 crore	Up to ₹250 crore	Up to ₹125 crore	Up to ₹500 crore	Encourages larger firms to remain in the MSME sector, enhances global competitiveness, and attracts greater investments.



New MSME Classification Criteria as per Union Budget 2025

ENTERPRISE CATEGORY	CURRENT INVESTMENT LIMIT	REVISED INVESTMENT LIMIT	CURRENT TURNOVER LIMIT	REVISED TURNOVER LIMIT
MICRO ENTERPRISE	₹1 crore	₹2.5 crore	₹5 crore	₹10 crore
SMALL ENTERPRISE	₹10 crore	₹25 crore	₹50 crore	₹100 crore
MEDIUM ENTERPRISE	₹50 crore	₹125 crore	₹250 crore	₹500 crore

MSME CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE ECONOMY

MSME Contribution to GDP & Manufacturing GVA

Year	MSME GVA as % of GDP	MSME Manufacturing GVA as % of All India Manufacturing GVA
2019-20	30.48%	40.67%
2020-21	27.24%	40.30%
2021-22	29.15%	40.83%

MSME Share in Indian Exports

Year	% Share of MSME Exports in Total Indian Exports
2019-20	49.77%
2020-21	49.35%
2021-22	45.03%
2022-23	43.59%
2023-24*	45.56% (up to September 2023)

Key MSME Statistics: Total Employment (Udyam Registration Portal, 01.07.2020–06.12.2023): 15.50 crore
Estimated Credit Gap in MSME Sector (Expert Committee, RBI 2018): ₹20-25 trillion

GOVT SCHEME/INITIATIVES

- PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP):** Credit-linked subsidy scheme to promote self-employment.
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** Provides loans up to ₹10 lakh for micro and small enterprises.
- Credit Guarantee Scheme:** Facilitates collateral-free loans up to ₹5 crore for MSMEs.

- Self-Reliant India (SRI) Fund:** ₹50,000 crore equity infusion to support MSME growth.
- Udyam Assist Platform (Launched on 11.01.2023):** Helps formalize Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) for priority sector lending benefits.
- Retail & Wholesale Traders as MSMEs (Since 02.07.2021):** Enables them to avail priority sector lending benefits.
- Non-Tax Benefits Extension:** MSMEs continue to receive non-tax benefits for 3 years after an upward classification.
- Trade Receivable Discounting System (TReDS):** A digital platform for financing MSME trade receivables.

- Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS):** ₹5 lakh crore financial support for MSMEs during COVID-19 (valid till 31.03.2023).

MSME SIGNIFICANCE

- Employment:** MSMEs are a major source of jobs, especially in rural and economically weaker areas.
- Economic growth:** MSMEs help reduce regional imbalances and promote equitable distribution of wealth.
- Exports:** MSMEs contribute to a significant portion of India's exports.
- Innovation:** MSMEs promote innovation and create new products and services.

5. **Entrepreneurship:** MSMEs promote entrepreneurship and skills upgradation.
6. **Livelihoods:** MSMEs help sustain livelihoods, especially for women, youth, and groups in vulnerable situations.

MSME CHALLENGES

1. Infrastructure Issues:

Power: Unreliable power supply affects productivity.

Transportation: Poor transport networks hinder supply chain efficiency.

Technology: Limited access to technology and telecommunications slows growth.

2. **Regulatory Compliance:** Compliance becomes complex as MSMEs expand, increasing administrative burden.
3. **Access to Credit:** Slow credit disbursal and high interest rates make financing difficult.
4. **Technology Constraints:** Many MSMEs rely on outdated technology, making it hard to stay competitive.
5. **Marketing Challenges:** Poor cash flow, lack of expertise, and limited resources hinder marketing efforts.
6. **Cash Flow Issues:** Inconsistent revenue and delayed payments affect financial stability.
7. **Shortage of Skilled Labor:** Finding skilled workers for machinery, finance, and marketing remains a challenge.
8. **Lack of Innovation:** Limited skilled workforce and outdated technology reduce innovation capacity.

WAY TO IMPROVE MSME

1. Financial Access: Easier credit through government guarantees, microfinance, and alternative funding (crowdfunding, invoice discounting).
2. Skill Development: Vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, and sector-specific skill gap analysis.
3. **Regulatory Simplification:** Streamlined compliance, digitalized processes, and MSME

feedback mechanisms.

4. Market Access: B2B platforms, export promotion, and MSME-priority in government procurement.
5. Technology Adoption: Digital tools (ERP, e-commerce), Industry 4.0 (automation, IoT), and digital literacy training.
6. Innovation Support: Incubators, R&D grants, and IP protection for MSME innovations.

CONCLUSION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a pivotal role in India's economic development, contributing significantly to GDP, exports, and employment. The government's revised MSME classification and various support initiatives aim to enhance financial access, streamline regulations, and encourage technology adoption. Despite challenges like infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory complexities, and credit constraints, targeted improvements in funding, skill development, and innovation can drive sustainable growth. Strengthening MSMEs will not only boost entrepreneurship but also enhance India's global competitiveness and economic resilience.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. With reference to the MSME sector in India, consider the following statements:

1. The revised MSME classification in the Union Budget 2025 has increased both the investment and turnover limits for all categories of MSMEs.
2. MSMEs contribute to more than 50% of India's total exports.
3. The Udyam Assist Platform, launched in 2023, aims to formalize Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) for priority sector lending benefits.

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two

- C. All three
- D. None

Answer: B

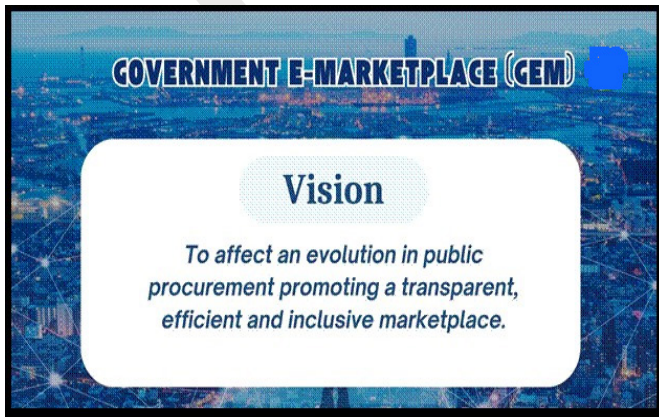
MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the significance of MSMEs in India’s economic growth and employment generation. Highlight key challenges faced by MSMEs and suggest measures to overcome them. (250 words, 15 marks)

THE STRATEGIC IMPACT OF GEM ON INDIA’S ECONOMY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

Public procurement plays a vital role in a nation’s economic growth, directly affecting citizens’ lives. Efficient and transparent government purchasing ensures the optimal use of public funds while stimulating business opportunities, job creation, and innovation. In India, the Government e-marketplace (GeM) has revolutionized public procurement, fostering an open and inclusive platform that benefits government buyers, startups, and small businesses alike. GeM has enabled startups to fulfil orders worth ₹35,950 crore, while women entrepreneurs make up 8% of the seller base, with 1,77,786 Udyam-verified women-led micro and small enterprises (MSEs) completing orders worth ₹46,615 crore.



WHAT IS GEM?

Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is an online platform for public procurement in India which was envisaged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The initiative was launched on August 09, 2016, by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry with the objective of creating an open and transparent procurement platform for government buyers.



CORE PRINCIPLES OF GEM

Openness: GeM shall be an open marketplace wherein it promotes access to information and transparency. Relevant information on sellers, goods, and services shall be easy to find and readily available for users. GeM shall provide databased insights to help users in decision-making and ascertaining price reasonability. **Fairness:** One of the platform’s key objectives is to allow sellers, big and small, to gain direct access to Government buyers. In doing so, all sellers shall be treated fairly, and GeM shall not offer promotional treatment to one seller over the other. GeM shall support the intentions behind the preferential market access policies and ensure that all sellers are provided with a level playing field. This will ensure the health and competitiveness of the marketplace.



Inclusiveness: GeM shall promote inclusiveness, which means that all Government buyers and sellers shall be accepted on the platform.

GeM shall aspire to create a robust seller base and all sellers interested in conducting business with the Government shall be welcomed on the platform. For buyers and sellers that do not have the know-how of using GeM, additional assistance in the form of focused training, onboarding sessions, and continued feedback and support shall be provided.

KEY FEATURES OF GEM

- 1. SWAYATT: Enhancing Business Access:** SWAYATT fosters ease of doing business by connecting startups, women entrepreneurs, MSEs, SHGs, and marginalized communities with government procurement. It focuses on training last-mile sellers and boosting small-scale participation.
- 2. Startup Runway 2.0: Driving Innovation:** This initiative enables startups to showcase their products and services to government buyers. A dedicated marketplace category ensures all startups, regardless of DPIIT certification, can access procurement opportunities, promoting "Make in India."

PLUTUS IAS
UPSC/PCS

Startups can list and sell their products to Govt buyers under

13 Startup sub-sectors

- Advanced Manufacturing and Robotics
- Advertising (AdTech)
- Agriculture (AgTech and New Foods)
- Artificial Intelligence
- Big Data and Analytics
- Augmented/ Virtual Reality
- Blockchain
- Clean Tech/ Renewables
- Consumer Home Electronics
- Cybersecurity
- Education Tech (EdTech)
- Fintech
- Health and Life Sciences and WaterTech.

- 3. Womaniya: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs:** Womaniya supports women entrepreneurs and SHGs by offering government procurement access for handicrafts, home décor, organic products, and more. It aligns with the 3% public procurement reservation for women-led MSMEs.



- 4. MSME SC/ST Entrepreneurs on GeM:** GeM collaborates with MSMEs, focusing on SC/ST entrepreneurs, ensuring 25% procurement from MSMEs, including a 4% sub-target for SC/ST businesses, fostering inclusivity in public procurement.
- 5. The Saras Collection: Showcasing Handcrafted Excellence:** A curated selection of handcrafted textiles, décor, accessories, and personal care items from India's top SHGs, The Saras Collection promotes traditional craftsmanship through government procurement.

The Saras Collection
Exquisitely handcrafted products from finest Self Help Groups in India

- SARAS HANDICRAFTS
- SARAS HANDLOOM TEXTILES
- SARAS GROCERY & PANTRY
- SARAS OFFICE ACCESSORIES
- SARAS PERSONAL CARE & HYGIENE PRODUCTS

CONTRIBUTIONS OF GEM TO THE INDIAN ECONOMY

The latest statistics reveal significant activity in the marketplace, showcasing a robust ecosystem with 162,985 primary buyers, 228,754 secondary buyers, and a diverse range of 11,006 product categories and 332 service categories. In the last financial year, the order volume reached 62,86,543, with an order value of ₹4,03,305 Crore. Continuing its momentum, the current financial year has already recorded 61,23,691 orders worth ₹4,52,594 Crore. Notably, 37.87% of the total order value is attributed to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), underscoring GeM's role in empowering local

businesses and fostering inclusive economic growth.

162,985 Primary Buyers	228,754 Secondary Buyers	11,006 Product Categories
332 Service Categories	6,286,543 Order Volume in Last FY	403,305 Order Value in Last FY (Cr.)
6,123,691 Order Volume in Current FY	452,594 Order Value in Current FY (Cr.)	37.87 Orders Value (MSE %)

ISSUES RELATED TO GEM

- 1. Registration Hurdles:** New users struggle with understanding the process, gathering documents, and completing KYC verification.
- 2. Technical Glitches:** System errors, slow loading, and document upload issues disrupt operations.
- 3. Product Listing Complexities:** Categorizing products, detailing specifications, and ensuring compliance can be difficult.
- 4. Vendor Verification Concerns:** Risk of fraudulent sellers and inconsistencies in the verification process.
- 5. Payment Delays:** Government departments sometimes process payments slowly, affecting sellers' cash flow.
- 6. Dispute Resolution Challenges:** Issues with resolving disputes related to deliveries, product quality, or contracts.
- 7. Unfair Competition:** Larger companies may have an edge over small vendors due to better resources and networks.
- 8. Lack of Awareness:** Some government buyers may not be fully familiar with GeM, leading to improper usage.
- 9. Compliance Issues:** Sellers may face difficulties adhering to quality standards, delivery timelines, and warranty obligations.

WAY FORWARD TO STRENGTHEN GEM NETWORK

- 1. Enhanced Technical Support:** Dedicated helpdesk and AI-driven support for faster issue resolution.

- 2. Stronger Vendor Verification:** Robust background checks to prevent fraudulent listings.
- 3. Timely Payments:** Implementing automated payment tracking and faster fund transfers.
- 4. Efficient Dispute Resolution:** A dedicated redressal mechanism with a structured grievance-handling system.
- 5. Awareness & Training:** Regular workshops, webinars, and outreach programs for buyers and sellers.
- 6. Improved User Interface:** Enhancing platform navigation for a seamless user experience.
- 7. Better Product Categorization:** Streamlining categories to simplify listing and search functionalities.
- 8. Data-Driven Insights:** Leveraging analytics to provide price benchmarking and demand forecasting.
- 9. Integration with Financial & Regulatory Systems:** Linking GeM with taxation, banking, and compliance platforms for smoother operations.
- 10. Boosting MSME & Startup Participation:** Special incentives, relaxed norms, and financial assistance for small businesses.

CONCLUSION

GeM has revolutionized public procurement in India by ensuring transparency, efficiency, and inclusivity. Strengthening the platform through streamlined processes, better technology, faster payments, and increased awareness will empower small businesses, boost MSME participation, and drive economic growth. Continuous innovation and policy support will further enhance GeM's role in transforming India's procurement landscape.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. With reference to the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), consider the following statements:

- GeM was launched by the Ministry of Finance to enhance transparency in public procurement.

2. The platform allows only DPIIT-certified startups to list their products and services.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the role of GeM in India's public procurement system. What challenges does it face, and how can it be strengthened?

(250 words, 15 marks)

AVALANCHES: A THREAT IN SNOW-COVERED MOUNTAINS

WHY IN THE NEWS?

A massive avalanche in Mana village, located in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district near the Indo-Tibetan border, trapped 57 workers engaged in a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) project. So far, 32 workers have been rescued, while efforts continue to save the remaining. Rescue operations have been hampered by a snowstorm in the region, making it difficult for teams, including the State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF), Garhwal 9 Brigade, and BRO, to carry out their work. Poor visibility has also prevented the use of helicopters. Authorities, including Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, have assured that all necessary resources, including medical support at ITBP Hospital, Srinagar Medical College, and AIIMS Rishikesh, are being mobilized. High-altitude rescue teams are on alert, and the government is in contact with Defence and Home Ministries for assistance.



WHAT IS AN AVALANCHE DISASTER?

An avalanche is a rapid downward movement of material triggered when loose material on a slope breaks away. It can carry additional debris, increasing its impact. Avalanches come in various forms, including rock, ice, and debris avalanches, but snow avalanches are the most common in mountainous regions. Snow avalanches range from small shifts (sluffing) to massive slab avalanches, which can reach speeds of 130 km/h, destroying forests and villages. They claim around 150 lives annually in North America and Europe, mostly affecting skiers, climbers, and snowmobilers. Fatalities have increased with the rise in winter sports.

SEVERITY OF AVALANCHE DISASTER IN INDIA

- 1. High-Risk Zones:** The Western Himalayas, especially Uttarakhand, have avalanche-prone Red Zones, causing severe damage and casualties.
- 2. Infrastructure Impact:** Avalanches block roads, railways, and highways, isolating communities and delaying rescues.
- 3. Loss of Life:** Rapid burial under snow results in high mortality if rescues are not immediate.
- 4. Economic Impact:** Avalanches disrupt winter tourism and damage infrastructure, leading to major economic losses.

Example: The 2021 Uttarakhand glacier collapse triggered an avalanche and flash flood, killing nearly 100 people.

THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY IN BORDER AREAS:

- 1. Cross-Border Terrorism:** Infiltration by terrorist groups, especially from Pakistan and Bangladesh, remains a major threat.
- 2. Smuggling & Illegal Immigration:** Porous borders facilitate arms, drugs, and human trafficking, threatening security.
- 3. Border Disputes:** Ongoing territorial disputes, particularly with China and Pakistan, create tensions.
- 4. Infiltration & Espionage:** Cross-border espionage and intelligence gathering pose serious risks.
- 5. Ethnic & Political Instability:** Insurgencies and separatist movements complicate security in border regions.
- 6. Technological & Cyber Threats:** Advanced technology like drones and cyberattacks challenge border defence systems.
- 7. Lack of Infrastructure:** Remote areas lack roads, surveillance, and communication, hindering security efforts.
- 8. Climate & Natural Disasters:** Harsh climates and disasters like floods complicate border management.
- 9. International Relations:** Diplomatic tensions with neighbouring countries affect border security cooperation.
- 10. Resource Constraints:** Limited ma



REASON OF AVALANCHE

- 1. High-Risk Zones:** The Western Himalayas, especially Uttarakhand, have Red Zones prone to avalanches, causing severe damage and casualties.
- 2. Infrastructure Impact:** Avalanches block roads, railways, and highways, isolating communities and delaying rescue efforts.
- 3. Loss of Life:** Rapid snow burial leads to high mortality if immediate rescue is not possible.
- 4. Economic Impact:** Avalanches disrupt winter tourism and damage infrastructure, causing major economic losses.
- 5. Impact on Defense Forces:** Frequent avalanches pose a significant threat to soldiers stationed in high-altitude border areas.
- 6. Climate Change Factor:** Rising temperatures and erratic snowfall patterns due to climate change are increasing avalanche occurrences.
- 7. Rescue Challenges:** Extreme weather conditions and difficult terrain make rescue operations complex and time-consuming.

CONSEQUENCE OF AVALANCHE DISASTER

- 1. Environmental Consequences Ecosystem Damage:** Destruction of forests, plants, and wildlife. Landslides & Flash Floods: Melting snow can trigger secondary disasters.
- 2. Infrastructure Damage Road & Structural Damage:** Avalanches block roads, destroy bridges, and damage buildings. Construction Disruptions: Unsafe conditions halt development projects.
- 3. Economic Impact Tourism Losses:** Disrupts winter tourism and damages resorts. High Recovery Costs: Repairs to infrastructure and services demand huge funds.
- 4. Human Consequences Fatalities:** Suffocation, trauma, or hypothermia can lead to death. Displacement: Avalanches force communities to relocate.

NDMA GUIDELINE PREVENT AVALANCHE

- 1. Be Alert:** Stay updated with weather warnings and watch for signs like falling rocks, cracking trees, or moving debris.
- 2. Move to Safety:** If your home is near a debris-prone area, relocate to a safer place.
- 3. Be Prepared:** Keep emergency essentials like a battery-operated radio, drinking water, first aid kit, and medicines.
- 4. Call for Help:** Contact rescue teams if needed.
- 5. Report Damage:** Inform authorities about damaged roads, power lines, and communication networks.
- 6. Help Others:** Assist elderly people, children, and those in need during emergencies.

MAJOR TO REDUCE AVALANCHE DISASTER

- Avalanche control structures
Avalanche detention walls: Stop, deflect, or retard avalanches
Avalanche dams: Protect roads, power lines, and other areas from avalanches
Fences: Hold snow in place
Explosives: Clear snow from avalanche-prone areas
- Avalanche zoning Create avalanche hazard maps to identify areas at risk Restrict land use in high-risk areas
- Forest protection Preserve and protect forests in areas where avalanches are likely to start
- Other avalanche mitigation methods Userakesordiversionstructures Forecast avalanches and evac ate people from endangered areas Use avalanche victim detectors to identify avalanche-prone locations

CONCLUSION

Avalanches pose a severe threat to life, infrastructure, and the environment, especially in the Western Himalayas, where frequent disasters impact communities, defence forces, and the

economy. The recent avalanche in Uttarakhand highlights the urgency of implementing effective mitigation strategies, including early warning systems, avalanche control structures, and proper zoning. Strengthening disaster preparedness and rescue capabilities is crucial to minimizing casualties and economic losses. With climate change contributing to increasing avalanche risks, a proactive approach, including sustainable development and environmental conservation, is essential to reducing future disasters and ensuring the safety of vulnerable regions.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. Which of the following statements is correct about Avalanches?

1. Avalanches are caused only by natural factors such as snowfall and temperature variations.
2. Human activities like deforestation and infrastructure development can increase the risk of avalanches.
3. Avalanches can trigger secondary disasters like landslides and flash floods.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Avalanches pose a significant threat to mountainous regions, impacting lives, infrastructure, and the economy. Discuss the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies for avalanche disasters in India (250 words, 15 marks)

INDIA'S AI REVOLUTION : A ROADMAP TO VIKSIT BHARAT

WHY IN THE NEWS?

India is rapidly emerging as a global AI leader, with the government actively shaping an inclusive AI ecosystem. For the first time, AI resources like computing power, GPUs, and research opportunities are becoming widely accessible and affordable. Through initiatives like the IndiaAI Mission and Centres of Excellence for AI, the government is empowering students, startups, and innovators, ensuring a level playing field. These efforts align with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, leveraging AI for economic growth, governance, and societal progress.



AI COMPUTE AND SEMICONDUCTOR INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the fundamental pillars of AI growth is robust computational power, underpinned by advanced semiconductor infrastructure. India has recognized this need and is investing heavily in building AI-specific high-performance computing (HPC) capabilities. Semiconductor Manufacturing: The Indian government launched the Semicon India Programme in 2021, with an outlay of ₹76,000 crores to develop domestic semiconductor manufacturing. Partnerships with Micron Technology, Foxconn, and Vedanta aim to reduce dependency on imports and establish India as a semiconductor hub.

AI Supercomputing Infrastructure: The National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) has been enhancing AI computational capabilities through the PARAM series of supercomputers. Additionally, companies like Tata, Nvidia, and Reliance Jio are collaborating to build AI-focused cloud infrastructure in India. Example: In 2023, India's AI research community saw an increase in access to high-performance GPUs through initiatives like the Bhashini Mission and private-sector partnerships.

ADVANCING AI WITH OPEN DATA AND CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (COE)

Data is the fuel for AI, and ensuring open and accessible data is key to fostering innovation. India's Open Data Initiative: The National Data Governance Framework Policy (NDGFP) promotes open government data, enabling startups and researchers to leverage public datasets for AI model training. AI Centres of Excellence (CoE): The government is setting up AI CoEs under MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and IT) in collaboration with academic institutions like IITs and IISc to drive AI research and innovation. Example: NASSCOM's AI CoEs are working on projects related to healthcare, agriculture, and smart governance, enabling AI adoption across multiple sectors.

INDIA'S AI MODELS & LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES

India's linguistic diversity necessitates AI models that cater to multiple languages, making Natural Language Processing (NLP) a key focus area. Bhashini Initiative: The Bhashini project, launched under Digital India, focuses on creating AI-powered language models that support Indic languages, ensuring digital inclusivity. Indian Large Language Models (LLMs): Startups like Sarvam AI, Krutrim AI, and AI4Bharat are building LLMs trained on Indic datasets to facilitate AI-driven applications in local languages. Example: AI models like GPT-4 and Llama 2 are being adapted for Indian languages through initiatives by IIT Madras and AI4Bharat, improving accessibility in education, governance, and customer services.



AI INTEGRATION WITH DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including Aadhaar, UPI, and CoWIN, is a model for global digital transformation. AI integration is set to enhance these platforms significantly.

AI-driven Aadhaar & e-Governance: AI is being used for fraud detection in Aadhaar authentication, improving service delivery.

AI in Healthcare & CoWIN Expansion: AI models helped optimize vaccine distribution via CoWIN, and similar technologies are now aiding Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission.

AI in Financial Inclusion: AI-powered chatbots and voice assistants are making financial services accessible to rural populations through platforms like Jan Dhan Yojana and DigiLocker.

AI-powered UPI & Fintech Growth: AI is improving fraud detection, transaction security, and personalized financial services in platforms like PhonePe, Paytm, and Google Pay.

AI for Governance & Public Services: AI-enabled chatbots are enhancing citizen engagement on platforms like MyGov and AI-driven analytics are optimizing government decision-making.

Example: ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) is using AI to democratize e-commerce by enabling small retailers to compete

with large players like Amazon and Flipkart.

AI in Smart Cities & Urban Planning: AI-driven traffic management systems, waste management solutions, and predictive policing models are improving urban governance in cities like Bangalore and Pune.

AI in Agriculture & Rural Development: AI-powered weather prediction models and crop advisory systems like Krishi 24x7 and Kisan AI Chatbots are supporting farmers with real-time insights.

India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including Aadhaar, UPI, and CoWIN, is a model for global digital transformation. AI integration is set to enhance these platforms significantly.

AI TALENT & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Building a skilled AI workforce is essential for sustaining long-term AI innovation.

AI in Education: Institutions like IITs, IIITs, and NITs are integrating AI courses into their curriculum. NASSCOM's FutureSkills Prime is training professionals in AI and ML.

AI for Rural & MSME Workforce: Initiatives like the Skill India Mission are offering AI upskilling programs for small businesses and rural workers.

Government-Led AI Skilling Programs: The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) now includes AI and data science courses to boost employability.

Corporate AI Training Initiatives: Tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and IBM are partnering with Indian universities to offer AI certifications.

AI Research & Fellowships: SERB (Science and Engineering Research Board) and MeitY are funding AI Ph.D. fellowships and research grants to encourage deep AI expertise.

Example: Google and Microsoft have launched AI skilling programs targeting 2 million Indians, ensuring AI literacy at multiple levels.

AI in Schools: The CBSE AI Curriculum is introducing AI literacy at the school level, ensuring early exposure to AI concepts among students.

Women in AI: Initiatives like WiDS (Women in Data Science) India and NASSCOM's Women in AI Program aim to bridge the gender gap in AI careers.

Building a skilled AI workforce is essential for sustaining long-term AI innovation.

AI ADOPTION & INDUSTRY GROWTH

The AI-driven industrial revolution is re-shaping multiple sectors in India.

AI in Manufacturing: AI-powered predictive maintenance and automation solutions, such as those by TCS and Bosch, are enhancing operational efficiency in factories.

AI in Smart Cities: AI-driven traffic management systems in cities like Bangalore and Delhi are improving urban mobility and reducing congestion.

AI in Retail: Companies like Reliance Jio and Flipkart leverage AI for personalized recommendations, supply chain optimization, and fraud detection.

AI in Governance: The government is using AI in tax compliance (GSTN AI analytics) and AI-driven legal case management to enhance efficiency.

AI in Defence: The Indian armed forces are integrating AI-powered surveillance, autonomous drones, and cybersecurity solutions for national security.

AI in Logistics: AI-driven route optimization and automated warehousing solutions by firms like Delhivery and Blue Dart are revolutionizing supply chain management.

AI in Healthcare: AI-driven diagnostics (e.g., Wadhvani AI's tuberculosis detection models) are improving public health outcomes.

AI in Agriculture: AI-based precision farming solutions like AgNext and Gramophone are optimizing crop yields and reducing resource wastage.

AI in Finance: Fintech firms like Razorpay and Paytm leverage AI for fraud detection and personalized financial services.

Example: The AI-powered SATYABHAMA platform in the mining sector is automating compliance and exploration processes.

A PRAGMATIC AI REGULATION APPROACH

Balancing AI innovation with ethical and security concerns is crucial for responsible AI deployment.

Draft National AI Policy: The Indian government is developing a comprehensive AI framework focusing on safety, ethics, and accountability.

Sector-Specific AI Guidelines: RBI's AI guidelines for fintech and MeitY's AI framework for public services ensure responsible AI use.

AI & Cybersecurity Measures: Strengthening AI-driven cybersecurity frameworks to counter threats from

deepfakes, data breaches, and algorithmic biases.

AI & Privacy Laws: Integrating AI regulations with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act, 2023) to protect user rights.

AI Ethics Committees: Establishing AI ethics boards in major institutions to assess and mitigate risks associated with AI applications.

Example: India has rejected overly restrictive AI regulations like EU's AI Act, opting for a balanced, innovation-friendly approach that protects users while fostering growth.

CONCLUSION

India's AI revolution is paving the way for 'Viksit Bharat', with advancements in semiconductor infrastructure, AI compute power, and digital public infrastructure. The government's push for open data, AI skilling programs, and responsible AI regulation ensures sustainable AI-driven economic growth. By fostering a thriving AI ecosystem, India is poised to become a global AI powerhouse, driving innovation and inclusive development towards a prosperous digital future.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. With reference to India's semiconductor manufacturing initiatives, consider the following statements:

1. The Semicon India Programme was launched to promote domestic semiconductor manufacturing.
2. Micron Technology and Vedanta are among the key players collaborating with India in this sector.
3. The initiative is part of the broader National Supercomputing Mission (NSM).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

ANSWER: A**MAINS QUESTIONS:**

Q. Discuss the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India's vision for Viksit Bharat 2047. Highlight key initiatives taken by the government to promote AI-driven economic and social development. (250 words, 15 marks)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**WHY IN THE NEWS?**

International Women's Day (IWD) is an annual global celebration that aims to educate society on the remarkable women's rights movement while celebrating the cultural, political, and socio-economical achievements of women and girls. It is annually celebrated on March 8 every year, and in 2025, it will be falling on a Saturday. This day marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity and highlighting the ongoing efforts for continued advocacy and action worldwide.

**BACKGROUND OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

Vladimir Lenin declared March 8 as International Women's Day in 1922 to honour the women's role in 1917 Russian Revolution; it was subsequently celebrated on that date by the socialist movement and communist countries. The holiday became a mainstream global holiday following its promotion by the United Nations in 1977.

Origins & Key Milestones

- **1908:** 15,000 women marched in New York for better rights.
- **1910:** Clara Zetkin proposed IWD at a socialist conference.
- **1911:** First IWD observed in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland.
- **1913:** March 8 became the official date.
- **1917:** Russian women's protests led to voting rights.
- **1975:** UN officially recognized IWD.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA

1. Government Schemes for Women Empowerment
 - Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015): Promotes the survival, protection, and education of girls.
 - Mahila Shakti Kendra (2017): Provides skill development and employment opportunities.
 - One Stop Centre Scheme (2015): Supports women facing violence with legal and medical aid.
 - Ujjwala Yojana (2016): Provides free LPG connections to women from poor households.
 - Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (2015): Savings scheme for girls' education and marriage.
 - Working Women Hostel Scheme: Ensures safe accommodation for working women.
 - Nari Shakti Puraskar: National award recognizing women achievers.
2. Legal Acts for Women's Rights
 - The Dowry Prohibition Act (1961): Ban dowry in marriages.
 - The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005): Protects against domestic abuse.
 - The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013): Ensures a safe work environment.
 - The Maternity Benefit Act (1961, amended in 2017): Provides paid maternity leave.
 - The Hindu Succession Act (2005 Amendment): Grant equal property rights to daughters.
 - The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006): Prevents early marriages.

3. Policies for Women's Empowerment National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001): Focuses on education, health, and economic empowerment. Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj (1993): 33% reservation in local governance. Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP): Supports women-led startups. Mission Shakti (2022): Merges various women's welfare schemes for better implementation.

ISSUES INDERING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

1. **Cultural & Social Barriers:** Patriarchal Mindset Restricts women's choices and public participation.
2. **Education Disparity:** Rural girls face limited access to quality education, leading to lower literacy rates and fewer opportunities.
3. **Economic Dependence:** Restricted access to jobs, finance, and land ownership keeps women financially dependent on men.
4. **Child Marriage:** Early marriage deprives girls of education, increasing poverty and dependence.
5. **Domestic Violence:** Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse limits women's ability to assert their rights.
6. **Dowry System:** Dowry demands lead to financial strain and violence, including bride burning.
7. **Workplace Discrimination:** Women face unequal pay, limited promotions, and sexual harassment at work.
8. **Legal Awareness & Enforcement Issues:** Laws exist but are poorly implemented, and women struggle to access justice.
9. **Gender Bias in Healthcare:** Poor access to reproductive and general healthcare affects women's well-being.
10. **Rural-Urban Divide:** Rural women face greater challenges in education, healthcare, and employment than urban women.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Strengthening Education & Awareness:** Encourage STEM education for girls and integrate gender sensitization into school curricula.
2. **Economic Inclusion:** Promote women-led entrepreneurship and ensure equal pay for equal work.
3. **Strict Law Implementation:** Improve legal enforcement and create fast-track courts for gender-based crimes.
4. **Social Change Campaigns:** Run media campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality.
5. **Enhancing Political Representation:** Advocate for women's participation in governance beyond 33% reservation.
6. **Better Healthcare Access:** Increase affordable healthcare services, especially in rural areas, focusing on maternal health and family planning.
7. **Technology & Digital Inclusion:** Bridge the digital divide by ensuring women's access to technology and financial literacy programs.

CONCLUSION

While significant progress has been made in women's empowerment, challenges persist due to deep-rooted societal norms and economic disparities. A multi-sectoral approach involving the government, private sector, and civil society is crucial to achieving true gender equality. International Women's Day serves as a powerful reminder to continue the fight for women's rights and create a more inclusive and equitable society for future generations.

"EMPOWERED WOMEN EMPOWER THE NATION!"

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme aims to improve child sex ratio and promote girls' education.
2. The Maternity Benefit Act, 2017, increased paid maternity leave to 36 weeks for all working women in India.
3. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, makes the giving and receiving of dowry a punishable offence.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Answer: A

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. Discuss the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in India. How can policies be strengthened to support them? (250 words, 15 marks)

NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE (NBWL): A CRITICAL INSTITUTION FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN INDIA

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has recently been in the spotlight as Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired its latest meeting to discuss critical decisions regarding wildlife conservation and habitat protection. During this meeting, key policies were deliberated upon, including new proposals for protected areas, mitigation measures for developmental projects affecting wildlife corridors, and strategies for enhancing biodiversity conservation. The board's decisions have far-reaching implications for India's environmental policies, especially in the context of balancing development with ecological sustainability.



WHAT IS NBWL?

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is the apex advisory body in India responsible for wildlife conservation and protection. It is formed under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and plays a crucial role in shaping policies related to wildlife conservation, approving developmental projects in eco-sensitive zones, and recommending necessary measures to protect biodiversity.

FORMATION OF NBWL

NBWL was established in accordance with Section 5A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. It was created to replace the Indian Board for Wildlife, which was earlier responsible for advising the government on matters related to wildlife preservation.

The board has a statutory status, and its recommendations are significant for ensuring that developmental activities do not negatively impact India's rich wildlife heritage. Over the years, NBWL has played a decisive role in shaping India's conservation policies and implementing measures to safeguard the country's diverse flora and fauna.

COMPOSITION OF NBWL

NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister of India and includes various members, such as:

1. Union Minister, Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF NBWL

NBWL is tasked with multiple responsibilities aimed at strengthening wildlife conservation efforts in India:

- 1. Approval of Projects Affecting Protected Areas:** Any developmental project impacting wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, or eco-sensitive zones must receive NBWL's approval before proceeding.
- 2. Formulating Conservation Policies:** The board advises the central government on framing policies and laws to protect endangered species and habitats.
- 3. Reviewing Conservation Measures:** It assesses the effectiveness of conservation projects and suggests improvements where necessary.
- 4. Monitoring Wildlife Protection Efforts:** The board evaluates compliance with wildlife laws and ensures that conservation strategies are effectively implemented.
- 5. Promoting Sustainable Development:** NBWL works on balancing ecological preservation with infrastructure development by recommending mitigation measures.

MAJOR DECISIONS BY NBWL

Over the years, NBWL has made several landmark decisions that have significantly impacted India's conservation landscape:

- 1. Expansion of Protected Areas:** The board has approved new protected areas, including wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, to enhance biodiversity conservation.
- 2. Mitigation Measures for Infrastructure Projects:** NBWL has recommended eco-sensitive measures such as constructing wildlife corridors and underpasses to reduce human-animal conflicts.
- 3. Stricter Regulations for Mining and Industrial Activities:** The board has scrutinized projects that could lead to deforestation and habitat destruction, ensuring compliance with environmental norms.
- 4. Approval of Tiger Reserves and Conservation Plans:** The board has played a crucial role in approving and implementing tiger conservation projects under the Project Tiger initiative.

ISSUES RELATED TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN INDIA

Despite NBWL's efforts, wildlife conservation in India faces several challenges:

- 1. Habitat Destruction:** Rapid urbanization, deforestation, and encroachment have led to significant habitat loss for many species. The expansion of infrastructure projects like highways and railways has fragmented wildlife corridors, affecting animal migration patterns.
- 2. Human-Wildlife Conflict:** As human settlements expand into forested areas, incidents of human-wildlife conflict have risen. Cases of elephant and leopard attacks on villages and retaliatory killings of animals highlight the urgent need for better mitigation strategies.
- 3. Illegal Wildlife Trade:** Poaching and illegal wildlife trade continue to threaten species like tigers, rhinos, and pangolins. Despite stringent laws, organized wildlife crime remains a challenge.
- 4. Climate Change:** Changing climate patterns are affecting wildlife habitats, leading to alterations in food availability and migration routes. Rising temperatures and unpredictable monsoon patterns are impacting species survival.
- 5. Weak Implementation of Laws:** Although India has robust wildlife protection laws, enforcement remains weak in many areas due to lack of resources, corruption, and political interference.

WAY FORWARD FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

To strengthen wildlife conservation efforts in India, the following steps must be undertaken:

- 1. Strengthening Conservation Laws:** Amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act should focus on stricter penalties for illegal activities and improved monitoring mechanisms.
- 2. Community Involvement in Conservation:** Local communities should be empowered through eco-tourism and sustainable livelihood

programs to encourage them to protect wildlife.

3. **Enhancing Wildlife Corridors:** Infrastructure projects must integrate wildlife corridors and safe passageways to reduce habitat fragmentation.
4. **Use of Technology:** Advanced tracking systems, camera traps, and artificial intelligence can help monitor wildlife populations and prevent poaching.
5. **Stronger International Cooperation:** India should collaborate with global conservation organizations to tackle issues like illegal wildlife trade and habitat destruction.

CONCLUSION

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) plays a crucial role in shaping India's wildlife conservation policies. While it has taken significant steps to balance development with ecological sustainability, challenges like habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and climate change continue to pose serious threats. Strengthening conservation laws, involving communities, and using technology effectively can go a long way in ensuring a sustainable future for India's wildlife. With proactive measures and strong political will, NBWL can continue to be a guiding force in preserving India's rich biodiversity for future generations.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS:

Q: Which of the following statements about the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is correct?

- A. NBWL is a statutory body formed under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
- B. The Prime Minister of India serves as the Chairperson of NBWL.
- C. NBWL does not have any role in approving infrastructure projects affecting wildlife.
- D. The board primarily focuses on marine biodiversity conservation.

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS:

Q. India has a robust legal framework for wildlife conservation, yet challenges like habitat destruction and poaching persist. Critically examine the role of NBWL in addressing these issues and suggest ways to improve its efficiency. (250 words, 15 marks)