

Plutus IAS

UPSC & State PCS

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CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY

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Editor's Note

This monthly current-affairs compilation is designed to holistically cover all the relevant and important topics for the Civil Services Examination, to make aspirants exam-ready. It is a secondary source; the newspaper remains your primary source.

Current affairs are no longer merely 'current' — they are Contemporary Affairs. Questions in both Prelims and Mains assess conceptual clarity. This issue is prepared to help you internalise the interlinkages of static and dynamic news events.

— Aanya, your Current Affairs teacher, Plutus IAS

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Science & Technology

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Upcoming Exam Calendar

Updated till 2026-08-05. Dates are indicative — always confirm on the official commission website.

UPSC Civil Services (CSE) 2026

Written result out

Notification	Feb 2026 (out)	Apply by	Closed
Prelims	24 May 2026 (result 15 Jun)	Mains	21-30 Aug 2026 (DAF-I closed 28 Jun)
Interview	Nov-Dec 2026 (tent.)	Fee	Rs 100 (Gen); SC/ST/PwBD/Women exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

UPSC Civil Services (CSE) 2027

Notification Jan 2027

Notification	13 Jan 2027	Apply by	2 Feb 2027
Prelims	23 May 2027	Mains	from 20 Aug 2027 (5 days)
Interview	2028 (tent.)	Fee	Rs 100 (Gen); SC/ST/PwBD/Women exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

UPSC Indian Forest Service (IFoS) 2027

Application notification released

Notification	13 Jan 2027 (with CSE)	Apply by	2 Feb 2027
Prelims	23 May 2027 (CSE paper)	Mains	from 21 Nov 2027
Interview	2028 (tent.)	Fee	Rs 100 (Gen); SC/ST/PwBD/Women exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

UPSC Engineering Services (ESE/IES) 2027

Notification ~16 Sep 2026 (tent.)

Prelims 31 Jan 2027

Interview 2027 (tent.)

Notification expected Sep 2026
Apply by ~6 Oct 2026 (tent.)

Mains 18 Jun 2027

Fee Rs 200 (Gen); SC/ST/
PwBD/Women exempt[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**UPSC CDS (I) 2027****Notification Dec 2026**

Notification 2 Dec 2026

Prelims 11 Apr 2027 (written)

Fee Rs 200 (Gen); SC/ST/
Women exempt

Apply by 22 Dec 2026

Interview SSB interview after result

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**UPSC NDA & NA (I) 2027****Notification Dec 2026**

Notification 2 Dec 2026

Prelims 11 Apr 2027 (written)

Fee Rs 100 (Gen); SC/ST
exempt

Apply by 22 Dec 2026

Interview SSB interview after result

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**UPSC CAPF (AC) 2027****Notification expected ~Feb 2027**Notification ~Feb 2027 (exact date
TBA)

Prelims 4 Jul 2027 (written, tent.)

Fee Rs 200 (Gen); SC/ST/
Women exempt

Apply by Mar-Apr 2027 (tent.)

Interview Physical + Interview after
result[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

UPPSC PCS 2026 (Uttar Pradesh)**Exam calendar released**

Notification	25 Jun 2026 (out)	Apply by	27 Jul 2026
Prelims	6 Dec 2026	Mains	To be announced
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Rs 125 (Gen/OBC); Rs 65 (SC/ST) — verify on notification

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**MPPSC State Service 2026 (Madhya Pradesh)****Specialist mark list released**

Notification	31 Dec 2025 (155 posts)	Apply by	9 Feb 2026 (closed)
Prelims	26 Apr 2026 (done)	Mains	7-12 Sep 2026
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Rs 250 (Gen); Rs 150 (MP reserved)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**RPSC RAS 2026 (Rajasthan)****Previous year question paper released**

Notification	27 May 2026 (out, 607 posts)	Apply by	3 Jul 2026 (closed)
Prelims	6 Dec 2026 (revised from 29 Nov 2026)	Mains	1-2 May 2027
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Rs 600 (Gen); Rs 400 (Raj. reserved)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

BPSC CCE (Bihar) — 71st & 72nd cycles**Interview postponed**

Notification	72nd: 5 May 2026 (out)	Apply by	72nd: closed 31 May 2026
Prelims	72nd: POSTPONED (was 26 Jul 2026), new date awaited	Mains	71st: held 25-30 Apr 2026 (result awaited); 72nd: after Prelims
Interview	71st: schedule awaited from BPSC	Fee	Rs 600 (Gen); Rs 150 (Bihar SC/ST/PwD/Women)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**HPSC HCS (Haryana Civil Services) 2026****HPSC ADA result out**

Notification	30 Jan 2026 (out)	Apply by	Closed
Prelims	26 Apr 2026 (done)	Mains	27-29 Jun 2026 (done)
Interview	Awaited	Fee	Check official (hpsc.gov.in)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**UKPSC PCS / Upper Subordinate 2026 (Uttarakhand)****Interview Programme Released**

Notification	Calendar out 17 Apr 2026	Apply by	Check official
Prelims	First fortnight of Oct 2026 (proposed)	Mains	27-30 Apr 2026 (earlier cycle, done); TBA for new cycle
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Check official (psc.uk.gov.in)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

WBPSB WBCS 2026 (West Bengal)

Notification	14 Nov 2025 (out)	Apply by	Closed (17 Dec 2025)
Prelims	14 Jun 2026 (done)	Mains	Nov-Dec 2026 (expected)
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Check official (psc.wb.gov.in)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

PPSC PCS 2026 (Punjab) Mains completed — result/interview awaited

Notification	Out (322 posts)	Apply by	Closed
Prelims	Done (earlier in cycle)	Mains	1-10 Apr 2026 (done)
Interview	Awaited	Fee	Check official (ppsc.gov.in)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

HPPSC HAS/HPAS 2026 (Himachal Pradesh)

Notification	Awaited (delayed from expected Jan-Feb 2026)	Subject Knowledge Test marks released	
Prelims	TBA	Mains	TBA
Interview	TBA	Fee	Check official (hppsc.hp.gov.in)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

SSC CGL 2026

Application window extended

Notification	21 May 2026 (out)	Apply by	25 Jun 2026 (closed)
Prelims	Tier 1: Aug-Sep 2026 (exact dates awaited)	Mains	Tier 2: Dec 2026
Interview	N/A (document verification/skill test for some posts)	Fee	Rs 100 (Gen/OBC); SC/ST/PwBD/Women/Ex-servicemen exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

SSC CHSL 2026**Notification/application stage**

Notification	~Apr-May 2026 (verify on official site)	Apply by	Check official
Prelims	Tier 1: Jul-Sep 2026 (expected)	Mains	Tier 2: Dec 2026/Jan 2027 (expected)
Interview	N/A (skill test/typing test where applicable)	Fee	Rs 100 (Gen/OBC); SC/ST/PwBD/Women/Ex-servicemen exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**IBPS PO 2026****Notification released**

Notification	1 Jul 2026 (out)	Apply by	21 Jul 2026
Prelims	22-23 Aug 2026	Mains	4 Oct 2026
Interview	After Mains	Fee	Rs 850 (Gen/OBC); Rs 175 (SC/ST/PwBD)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)**SBI PO 2026****Prelims admit card released**

Notification	18 Jun 2026 (out)	Apply by	8 Jul 2026 (closed)
Prelims	~Early Aug 2026 (exact date awaited)	Mains	Sep 2026 (expected)
Interview	Psychometric test + Group Exercise + Interview after Mains	Fee	Rs 750 (Gen/OBC/EWS); SC/ST/PwBD exempt

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

RBI Grade B 2026

Phase II (Mains) imminent — 25 Jul 2026

Notification 29 Apr 2026 (out)

Apply by 20 May 2026 (closed)

Prelims Phase I: 13-14 Jun 2026
(done)

Mains Phase II: 25 Jul 2026

Interview After Phase II result

Fee Rs 850 (Gen/OBC/EWS);
Rs 100 (SC/ST/PwBD)

[Official notification](#) · [Syllabus & prep](#)

CLAT 2027 (UG & PG)

Registration open

[Official notification](#)

AILET 2027 (NLU Delhi)

Registration opens, exam date announced

[Official notification](#)

AIBE (All India Bar Examination)

[Official notification](#)

Bihar Civil Judge (PCS-J)

Final Answer Key released

[Official notification](#)

UP PCS-J (Civil Judge)

[Official notification](#)

JEE Main 2027

[Official notification](#)

JEE Advanced 2027

[Official notification](#)

NEET UG 2027

Counselling registration begins

[Official notification](#)

CUET UG 2027

[Official notification](#)

CBSE Class 12 Board 2027

Supplementary result expected

[Official notification](#)

SSC CPO 2026

[Official notification](#)

SSC MTS 2026

[Official notification](#)

IBPS Clerk 2026

Application window open

[Official notification](#)

SBI Clerk 2026

[Official notification](#)

RRB NTPC 2026

[Official notification](#)

NABARD Grade A 2026

[Official notification](#)

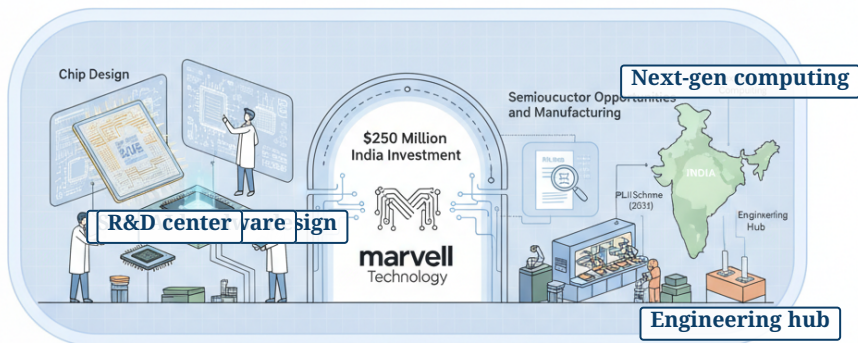
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Science & Technology



Section at a glance: Science & Technology

Semiconductor Industry Expansion in India: Implications for Engineering Aspirants and the National Ecosystem



X-ray view: Want a career in chip design? Marvell's \$250 million India investment may create new semic

GS Paper III — Science and Technology: Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life • GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

The \$250 million investment by Marvell Technology in India highlights the critical role of semiconductor design in

India's technological self-reliance and the urgent need for engineering students to...

Why is this in news?

The announcement by Marvell Technology, a US-based semiconductor company, of a \$250 million investment in India over the next three years underscores the growing strategic

importance of India in the global semiconductor value chain. This expansion, coinciding with the company's 20th year of operations in India, is poised to create significant career opportunities in advanced semiconductor design, AI hardware, and next-generation computing technologies, thereby reinforcing India's position as a critical engineering hub for global technology firms.

PRELIMS POINTER

India's semiconductor ecosystem has historically been dominated by design and R&D, with minimal manufacturing presence; however, recent policy initiatives such as the PLI Scheme for Semiconductors (2021) are...

Key Points

- India's semiconductor ecosystem has historically been dominated by design and R&D, with minimal manufacturing presence; however, recent policy initiatives such as the PLI Scheme for Semiconductors (2021) are incentivising domestic and foreign investments in fabrication units.
- Marvell Technology has been operating in India since 2006, with Bengaluru serving as its second-largest R&D centre globally, highlighting the country's long-standing role in semiconductor design and engineering.
- The global demand for semiconductor talent has surged due to advancements in AI, 5G, and cloud computing, creating a

critical skills gap that India is strategically positioned to address through targeted education and industry collaborations.

What is Semiconductor Design and Manufacturing?

- Semiconductors are materials with electrical conductivity between conductors and insulators, essential for manufacturing electronic components such as transistors, diodes, and integrated circuits (ICs).
- Semiconductor design involves the creation of ICs, which are the building blocks of modern electronics, including processors, memory chips, and sensors used in smartphones, computers, and IoT devices.
- The semiconductor value chain comprises design, fabrication (fab), assembly, testing, and packaging (ATMP), with each stage requiring specialised skills and infrastructure.
- Advanced semiconductor technologies include Very Large-Scale Integration (VLSI), System-on-Chip (SoC), and AI-optimised hardware, which are critical for next-generation computing, autonomous systems, and edge AI applications.
- India has traditionally excelled in semiconductor design and R&D, with companies like Marvell, Intel, and Texas Instruments operating major R&D centres in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune.
- Career opportunities in semiconductor design span roles such as VLSI engineers, SoC architects, firmware developers, verification engineers, and AI hardware specialists, with high demand for skills in Verilog, VHDL, and EDA tools.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Investment magnitude (\$250 million)	Signals long-term commitment to India's semiconductor ecosystem, enhancing R&D and engineering workforce capacity.
Expansion of facilities in Bengaluru and Hyderabad	Strengthens India's role as a global semiconductor design hub, leveraging existing infrastructure and talent pools.
Focus on AI, cloud computing, and data infrastructure	Aligns with India's strategic priorities in digital transformation and next-generation computing technologies.
Doubling of workforce over three years	Creates high-skilled employment opportunities for engineering graduates in semiconductor design and related fields.
Collaboration with hyperscalers and cloud providers	Integrates India's engineering talent into global technology supply chains, enhancing competitiveness.

Significance for India

- Direct foreign investment of \$250 million augments India's foreign exchange reserves and stimulates local economic activity through job creation and ancillary industries.
- Enhances India's position in the global semiconductor value chain, reducing import dependence and improving trade balance in high-technology sectors.
- Strengthens India's self-reliance in critical semiconductor technologies, aligning with the objectives of the Semicon India Programme and the India Semiconductor Mission.

- Reduces geopolitical vulnerabilities by diversifying semiconductor design and manufacturing capabilities beyond traditional hubs like the US and East Asia.
- Creates demand for specialised skills in semiconductor design, AI hardware, and high-speed connectivity, prompting curriculum reforms in engineering institutions.

Challenges

- **Talent Shortage in Semiconductor Design** — India faces a critical shortage of skilled professionals in advanced semiconductor design, AI hardware, and silicon engineering, necessitating targeted upskilling initiatives.
- **Infrastructure and Ecosystem Gaps** — Inadequate domestic semiconductor fabrication facilities constrain end-to-end value chain integration, limiting opportunities for local manufacturing.
- **Regulatory and Policy Hurdles** — Complex regulatory frameworks for technology transfer, intellectual property, and foreign investment may delay project execution.
- **Global Competition** — Intense competition from established semiconductor hubs in the US, Taiwan, South Korea, and China for talent and investment.

Way Forward

- Strengthen academia-industry collaboration through internships, joint research projects, and curriculum design in semiconductor engineering.
- Expand the Semicon India Programme's scope to include subsidies for semiconductor design tools, testing facilities, and talent development.

- Establish Centres of Excellence in semiconductor design and AI hardware within premier engineering institutions (e.g., IITs, NITs).
- Fast-track regulatory reforms to simplify approvals for semiconductor projects, including tax incentives and land allocation.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the semiconductor industry in India: 1. The Government of India launched the Semiconductor Policy 2021 to boost domestic semiconductor manufacturing. 2. Marvell Technology has announced a \$250 million investment in India over the next three years to expand its R&D capabilities. 3. Bengaluru and Hyderabad are the only cities in India designated as semiconductor manufacturing hubs under the National Semiconductor Mission. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is correct as the Semiconductor Policy 2021 was launched by the Government of India. Statement 2 is correct as Marvell Technology's \$250 million investment is reported in the news. Statement 3 is incorrect as multiple cities, including Pune, are involved in semiconductor activities.

Q2. Assertion (A): The National Semiconductor Mission aims to position India as a global hub for semiconductor design, manufacturing, and technology development. Reason (R): India's semiconductor ecosystem is currently limited to R&D centres and

lacks domestic manufacturing capabilities. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is true as the National Semiconductor Mission (NSM) seeks to establish India as a global semiconductor hub. Reason (R) is also true but does not directly explain the assertion, as NSM includes both R&D and manufacturing components.

Mains practice question

📌 The expansion of Marvell Technology's operations in India, including a \$250 million investment over three years, signifies a critical inflection point for the country's semiconductor ecosystem. Critically analyse the role of such investments in realising India's ambition to become a global semiconductor hub. Also, assess the challenges that may impede this transition. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

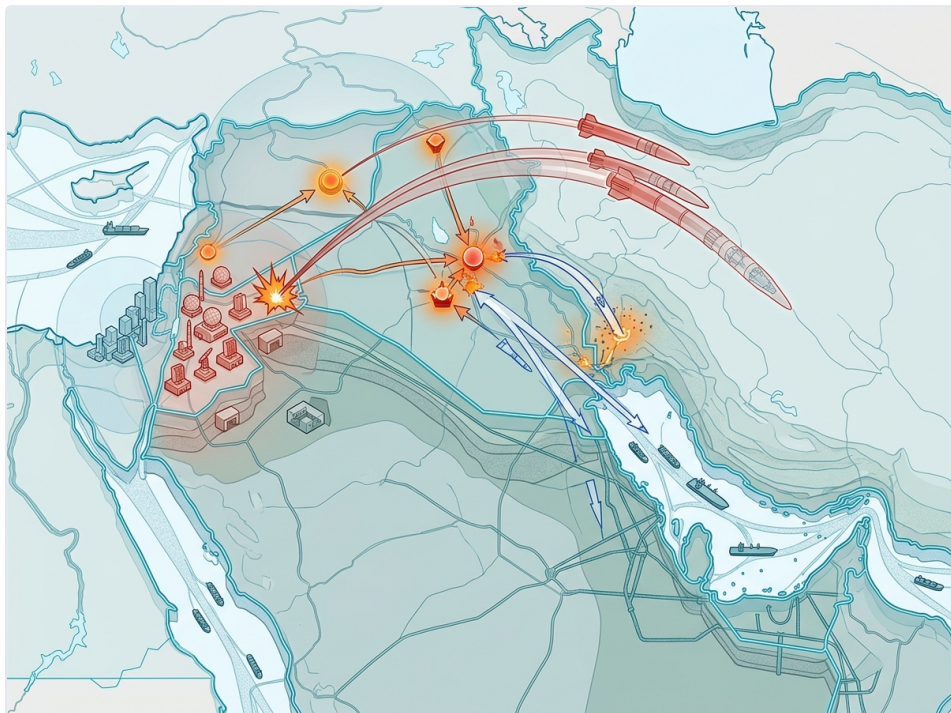
1. Introduction (2 marks)

- Briefly define the semiconductor ecosystem and its strategic importance in the context of AI, cloud computing, and data infrastructure.
- Mention Marvell Technology's investment and its significance as a case study for India's semiconductor ambitions.

2. Role of Investments in Realising Semiconductor Hub Ambitions (5 marks)

- Economic ...

Escalation in West Asia: US-Iran Military Confrontation and Its Geopolitical Implications



X-ray view: US launches fresh strikes on Iranian military targets after missile attack on American for

GS Paper II — International Relations: Regional and global groupings, India and its neighbourhood, Bilateral, regional and global groupings involving India • GS Paper II — International Relations: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests • GS Paper III — Security: Linkages between development and spread of extremism, Internal security challenges through external state and non-state actors

Why is this in news?

The United States launched targeted military strikes on Iranian military infrastructure, including

REMEMBER

The US-Iran military escalation underscores the fragility of regional stability in West Asia, with the Strait of Hormuz remaining a critical flashpoint for global energy security and India's energy import interests.

IRGC-linked sites, following a ballistic missile attack by Iran on US forces in Jordan. This escalation marks a significant intensification of hostilities in West Asia, with implications for regional stability, global energy markets, and India's strategic interests in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

Key Points

- The conflict in West Asia has been simmering since the October 2023 Hamas-Israel war, with Iran-backed proxies engaging in asymmetric warfare against Israel and US interests in the region.
- The Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint for global oil supplies, has been a flashpoint due to Iran's periodic threats to disrupt maritime traffic in response to Western sanctions and regional geopolitical tensions.
- The US has maintained a military presence in the Middle East, including in Jordan, to counter Iranian influence and support regional allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.
- The attack on US forces in Jordan represents a direct challenge to American deterrence posture in the region, prompting a robust retaliatory response.
- Regional spillover has extended to Iraq, where US-Saudi joint strikes targeted Iran-backed militias, and Egypt, where maritime assets were attacked, reflecting the widening scope of the conflict.

What is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)?

- The IRGC is a branch of Iran's Armed Forces, established in 1979 following the Islamic Revolution, with a dual mandate of

protecting the Islamic Republic and advancing its ideological and geopolitical objectives.

- It operates both as a conventional military force and a paramilitary organisation, overseeing Iran's ballistic missile programme, nuclear activities, and regional proxy networks.
- The IRGC's Quds Force is responsible for extraterritorial operations, including support to groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq and Syria.
- Designated as a terrorist organisation by the US, the IRGC plays a central role in Iran's foreign policy, often acting independently of the regular armed forces.
- The IRGC's influence extends to economic sectors, including construction, energy, and telecommunications, enabling it to fund and sustain its military and political activities.
- The organisation's doctrine of 'forward defence' involves projecting power beyond Iran's borders to counter perceived threats from the US, Israel, and Gulf states.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
US Strikes on IRGC Targets	Demonstrates direct military retaliation against Iranian state actors, escalating regional conflict dynamics.
Ballistic Missile Attack on Jordan	Represents a direct assault on US military assets in a third-country territory, violating sovereignty norms.
Expansion to Iraq and Egypt	Indicates regional spillover of hostilities, threatening stability in multiple Middle Eastern states.

Feature	Significance
Disruption of Global Oil Supply Chains	Impact on Brent crude prices reflects vulnerability of Strait of Hormuz to geopolitical tensions.
Diplomatic Impasse Post-Ceasefire Collapse	Highlights failure of regional mediation efforts amid ongoing military operations.

Significance for India

- Escalation of US-Iran hostilities risks broader Middle Eastern conflict, potentially involving Israel and Gulf states.
- Direct strikes on Iranian military infrastructure signal a shift from proxy warfare to conventional confrontation.
- Brent crude price surge (>7%) reflects market fears of supply disruptions, impacting India's energy security and inflation.
- Disruptions in Suez Canal and Strait of Hormuz routes may reroute global shipping, increasing trade costs.
- Regional mediators (e.g., Oman) face failure in brokering ceasefire, undermining trust in diplomatic solutions.

Challenges

- **Sovereignty Violations and Regional Instability** — Iraqi presidency condemns US-Saudi strikes as violations of sovereignty, highlighting legal and political dilemmas.
- **Energy Security Vulnerabilities** — Disruption of Strait of Hormuz threatens 20% of global oil supply, impacting India's energy imports and economic stability.
- **Diplomatic Failure and Escalation Risks** — Collapse of ceasefire talks and ongoing military operations limit scope for de-escalation.

- **Humanitarian and Civilian Impact** — Reported civilian casualties in Iran and Iraq exacerbate humanitarian crises, straining regional resources.

Way Forward

- Conduct high-level diplomatic engagements with US, Iran, and Gulf states to advocate for de-escalation and ceasefire restoration.
- Enhance India's energy security by diversifying oil import sources and expanding strategic petroleum reserves.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation with regional partners to safeguard trade routes in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea.
- Monitor and mitigate risks to Indian nationals and assets in the Middle East through enhanced consular and evacuation protocols.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran: 1. The IRGC is a branch of Iran's regular military and operates under the Ministry of Defence. 2. The IRGC controls the Quds Force, which is responsible for extraterritorial military and clandestine operations. 3. The IRGC has been designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States. 4. The IRGC's primary role is limited to internal security and domestic policing within Iran. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three

4. All

Answer: Only three — Statement 1 is incorrect: the IRGC is an independent military force separate from Iran's regular armed forces. Statement 2 is correct: the Quds Force is a special unit of the IRGC. Statement 3 is correct: the US has designated the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. Statement 4 is incorrect: the IRGC's mandate includes both internal security and extraterritorial operations.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Strait of Hormuz is a critical chokepoint for global oil supply, through which approximately 20% of the world's oil passes daily. Reason (R): The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and is bordered by Iran and Oman. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion A is correct: the Strait of Hormuz handles about 20% of global oil supply daily. Reason R is also correct and directly explains why it is a critical chokepoint, as it is the sole maritime route connecting the Persian Gulf to global markets.

Mains practice question

📌 The escalation of hostilities between the United States and Iran in the Middle East has demonstrated the fragility of regional security architecture. Critically examine the factors contributing to this instability, with particular reference to the role of non-state actors and the Strait of Hormuz. Also analyse the implications for India's energy security and foreign policy. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

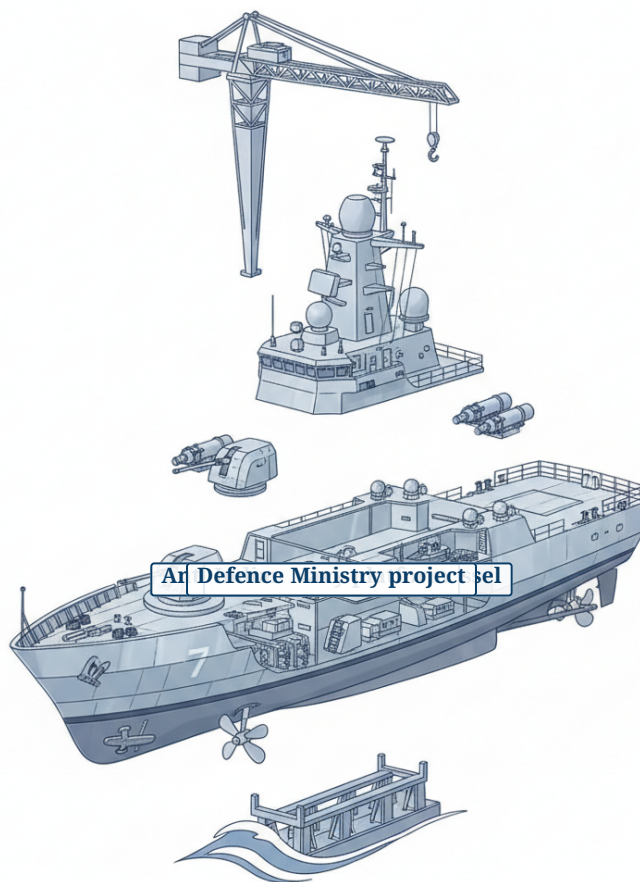
1. Introduction (2 Marks)

- Brief context: Recent US-Iran strikes (July 2026) and their regional spillover.
- Define key terms: IRGC, Strait of Hormuz, proxy wars, energy security.

2. Factors Contributing to Instability (6 Marks)

- **US-Iran Rivalry:** Trump administration's assertive foreign policy, designation of IRGC as FTO, and retaliatory strikes.
- Role ...

Cochin Shipyard's Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft: Strategic Indigenisation and Coastal Security Enhancements



Exploded view: Cochin Shipyard launches seventh anti-submarine warfare vessel for Indian Navy

GS Paper III — Security and Defence: Indigenisation of Defence Production, Make in India, Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) • GS Paper III — Science and Technology: Indigenous Shipbuilding Technologies, Naval Platforms, Hydrodynamic Design

✏ The Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft are indigenously built naval platforms, designed for anti-submarine warfare in

coastal waters, with a displacement of ~900 tonnes, speed of 25 knots, and...

Why is this in news?

The launch of the seventh Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Shallow Water Craft, Machilipatnam, by Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) on 29 July 2026

underscores India's

advancing indigenous shipbuilding capabilities and its commitment to enhancing coastal security through advanced naval platforms. The vessel, part of a series of eight ASW shallow water craft being built for the Indian Navy, exemplifies the Defence Ministry's indigenisation push under the 'Make in India' initiative, reducing reliance on foreign defence imports while strengthening the Indian Navy's operational readiness in littoral waters.

PRELIMS POINTER

Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), a state-owned shipyard under the Ministry of Defence, is the nodal agency for the construction of these vessels, highlighting the government's strategic focus on domestic defence...

Key Points

- Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), a state-owned shipyard under the Ministry of Defence, is the nodal agency for the construction of these vessels, highlighting the government's strategic focus on domestic defence manufacturing.
- The Mahe-class vessels are designed for multi-role operations, including anti-submarine warfare, mine countermeasures, and low-intensity maritime security operations, aligning with the Indian Navy's doctrinal shift towards expeditionary and coastal defence.

- India's coastal security architecture has been revamped post-26/11 Mumbai attacks, with a renewed emphasis on indigenous platforms, real-time surveillance, and integrated coastal security networks.
- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and Naval Shipbuilding Board have prioritised these platforms under the 'Make in India' initiative, with a target of 70% indigenous content in defence platforms by 2027.
- CSL's expertise in constructing advanced naval platforms, including aircraft carriers (INS Vikrant) and destroyers, positions it as a critical player in India's defence indigenisation ecosystem.

What are Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Shallow Water Craft?

- The Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft are indigenously designed and constructed naval platforms specifically tailored for anti-submarine warfare in shallow and coastal waters, where larger vessels cannot operate effectively.
- The class is named after coastal regions in India (e.g., Mahe, Machilipatnam), reflecting their operational focus on littoral and near-shore environments.
- Key design features include a length of 78.0 metres, beam of 11.36 metres, and a draught of 2.7 metres, enabling operations in shallow waters while maintaining stability and sea-keeping characteristics.
- The vessels have a displacement of approximately 900 tonnes, a maximum speed of 25 knots, and an endurance of 1,800 nautical miles, balancing speed, range, and operational flexibility.

- Primary armament includes advanced sonar systems, torpedo launchers, and mine-laying capabilities, enabling detection, tracking, and engagement of submarines in coastal waters.
- The Mahe-class vessels are equipped with state-of-the-art hydrodynamic hull designs to minimise resistance, enhance manoeuvrability, and reduce acoustic signatures for improved stealth.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Designation: Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft	Specialised vessel class for coastal anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations, optimised for shallow waters.
Length: 78.0 metres	Balances manoeuvrability in coastal waters with operational capacity for ASW missions.
Displacement: 900 tonnes	Ensures stability and endurance for extended patrols in littoral zones.
Maximum Speed: 25 knots	Facilitates rapid deployment and interception in coastal surveillance and ASW operations.
Endurance: 1,800 nautical miles	Enables sustained operations without frequent refuelling, critical for coastal patrol duties.
Mine Laying Capability	Enhances maritime security by enabling counter-mine operations in shallow waters.

Significance for India

- Augments India's coastal ASW capabilities, addressing vulnerabilities in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea littorals.

- Complements the Indian Navy's broader ASW architecture, including P-8I Poseidon aircraft and indigenous ASW helicopters.
- Demonstrates progress under the 'Make in India' initiative, reducing dependence on foreign-built ASW platforms.
- Validates Cochin Shipyard Limited's (CSL) capacity to deliver advanced naval vessels, reinforcing India's defence-industrial base.
- Designed for shallow-water ASW, enabling operations in confined and high-traffic maritime zones where larger vessels are ineffective.

Challenges

- **Technological Readiness** — Ensuring seamless integration of ASW sensors, sonars, and weapon systems with indigenous platforms to meet operational demands.
- **Industrial Capacity Constraints** — Scaling up shipbuilding infrastructure to meet future ASW vessel requirements without compromising quality or timelines.
- **Operational Doctrine Gaps** — Developing standardised ASW doctrines for shallow-water operations, including coordination with larger platforms and aircraft.
- **Budgetary Allocation Pressures** — Balancing the capital expenditure (CAPEX) for ASW platforms with other modernisation priorities, such as aircraft carriers and submarines.

Relevance for Prelims

Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft, Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), Yard 529, Machilipatnam, Indian

Navy's Project 28, Indigenisation, Make in India, Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), Naval Shipbuilding Board, Hydrodynamic Design, Displacement Tonnage, Sea-Keeping Characteristics, Coastal Surveillance, Subsurface Surveillance

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft being built for the Indian Navy: 1. The vessels are designed for anti-submarine operations in coastal waters. 2. The Machilipatnam, the seventh vessel in the series, has a displacement of approximately 900 tonnes. 3. These vessels are being constructed under the Make in India initiative. 4. The maximum speed of these vessels is 25 knots. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: All four — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is also correct as the vessels are part of India's indigenous shipbuilding efforts under Make in India. Thus, three statements are correct.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Indian Navy's Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft are primarily designed for mine-laying operations. Reason (R): These vessels are equipped with subsurface surveillance capabilities to detect and neutralise underwater threats. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — The primary role of the Mahe-class ASW vessels is anti-submarine warfare, including subsurface surveillance. Mine-laying is a secondary capability. Thus, A is false, but R is true.

Mains practice question

✍ Critically examine the significance of the indigenous construction of the Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft for India's maritime security architecture. Also, analyse the challenges in achieving self-reliance in defence shipbuilding under the 'Make in India' initiative. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Significance of Mahe-class ASW vessels (6 points, ~100 words):

- **Strategic autonomy:** Reduces dependence on foreign suppliers for coastal ASW capabilities.
- **Coastal security:** Enhances surveillance and anti-submarine operations in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and shallow waters.
- **Indigenous capacity building:** Strengthens India's shipbuilding ecosystem (e.g., Cochin Shipyard Limited, Garden Reach ...)

The Ethical Dilemma of AI Training: Digitisation of Rare Books and Cultural Preservation



Mind map: The Ethical Dilemma of AI Training: Digitisation of Rare

GS Paper II — Governance, Transparency and Accountability • GS Paper III — Science and Technology — Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life

Why is this in news?

Reports indicate that antiquarian book dealers across Europe and other regions are receiving bulk purchase requests from AI firms seeking rare books for

digitisation and subsequent destruction. This practice, driven by the demand for vast training datasets for generative AI models, raises critical questions about the ethical implications of converting physical cultural artefacts into disposable data inputs, thereby threatening the integrity of literary and historical heritage.

REMEMBER

The digitisation of rare books for AI training raises ethical concerns about cultural loss, legal ambiguities in intellectual property rights, and the irreversible destruction of physical artefacts that embody...

Key Points

- Generative AI systems, particularly large language models (LLMs), require extensive textual datasets for training to achieve high accuracy and contextual understanding.

- Digitisation of books has historically been undertaken by libraries and institutions under controlled conditions to preserve content while ensuring access, often adhering to copyright and ethical guidelines.
- The current trend involves private AI firms purchasing rare books in bulk, scanning them at high speeds, and destroying the originals post-digitisation, a process that bypasses traditional preservation norms.
- Concerns have been raised by librarians, authors, and cultural preservationists about the irreversible loss of physical artefacts that embody historical, artistic, and emotional significance.
- Legal frameworks governing AI training data usage vary globally; some jurisdictions permit such practices under broad interpretations of 'fair use' or 'data mining exceptions', while others impose stricter controls.
- The ethical debate intersects with broader discussions on intellectual property rights, cultural sovereignty, and the role of technology in shaping human memory and identity.

What is the issue surrounding the digitisation of rare books for AI training?

- AI training datasets: Generative AI models rely on vast corpora of text to learn language patterns, contextual nuances, and factual information. Rare books, with their unique linguistic and stylistic features, are particularly valuable for training high-performance models.
- Digitisation vs. destruction: Unlike traditional digitisation projects, where original books are preserved and digitised copies are supplementary, the current trend involves the

physical destruction of books post-digitisation, treating them as expendable raw material.

- **Cultural erosion:** Rare books often contain irreplaceable historical, literary, and artistic value. Their destruction for AI training represents a loss of tangible cultural heritage that cannot be replicated digitally.
- **Ethical concerns:** The practice raises questions about consent—authors and publishers may not have authorised the use of their works for AI training, and the destruction of originals deprives future generations of access to physical artefacts.
- **Legal ambiguities:** While some jurisdictions allow data mining for AI training under exceptions to copyright law, others lack clear regulations, leading to exploitative practices and ethical grey areas.
- **Economic incentives:** AI firms prioritise cost-efficiency and scalability, making bulk purchases of rare books financially attractive compared to negotiating licences or purchasing legal datasets.

Relevance for Prelims

Generative AI · Digital public goods · Intellectual property rights · Cultural heritage preservation · Optical character recognition (OCR) · Fair use doctrine · Copyright Act, 1957 · UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the digitisation of books for AI training: 1. The process of digitising books for AI training involves scanning every page and extracting text, after which the original books are destroyed. 2. The legality of such

digitisation is universally accepted across all jurisdictions. 3. The primary ethical concern is the potential loss of cultural heritage and historical records. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is correct as described in the article. Statement 2 is incorrect because legality varies by jurisdiction. Statement 3 is correct as the ethical concern revolves around cultural loss.

Q2. Assertion (A): The use of books as raw material for AI training is legally permissible under most copyright laws. Reason (R): Copyright laws in many jurisdictions allow the use of copyrighted material for purposes such as research, education, or technological advancement without explicit permission. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is true as digitisation for AI training may fall under exceptions in some jurisdictions. Reason (R) is true but does not fully explain the assertion, as copyright exceptions are often narrowly defined and contested.

Mains practice question

 The unchecked digitisation of rare and culturally significant books for training generative AI models poses a profound threat to

intellectual property rights and cultural preservation. Critically examine the ethical, legal, and societal implications of this practice. Also, suggest measures to balance technological advancement with the protection of cultural heritage. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Ethical Implications (4 marks)

- Loss of cultural heritage: Books as repositories of collective memory and identity (UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003).
- Moral dimensions: Books as companions and vessels of human experience (reference to the article's metaphor of books as 'homes').
- Consent and autonomy: ...

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: The Unaddressed Prerequisite for AI-Driven Educational Equity

Education Access Barriers

AI Tools

Assumes literacy

Digital Literacy

Limited access

Foundational Skills

Functional illiteracy

Marginalised Groups

Rural/community gaps

Education Access Barriers

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations • GS Paper III — Technology, Economic Development, Bio diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management

✎ Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is the gateway to equitable access to AI-driven educational tools, and its absence renders technology ineffective for millions of learners in India.

Why is this in news?

The article highlights the systemic failure to address foundational literacy and numeracy in India, despite the rapid adoption of

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. It underscores how AI tools, while promising access to knowledge, remain inaccessible to learners lacking basic reading and writing skills. The narrative of two children in Bengaluru and a college professor's classroom illustrates the pervasive issue of functional illiteracy, which renders AI tools ineffective for a significant segment of learners. This crisis is exacerbated by the national discourse on AI, which often overlooks the foundational prerequisites for meaningful engagement with technology in education.

PRELIMS POINTER

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) targets universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2030, aligning with India's domestic policy frameworks.

Key Points

- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) targets universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2030, aligning with India's domestic policy frameworks.

- Functional illiteracy—defined as the inability to read, write, or perform basic numeracy tasks—remains a persistent challenge in India, particularly among marginalised communities and rural populations.
- The proliferation of AI tools in education, such as generative AI for content creation, adaptive learning platforms, and automated assessment systems, assumes a baseline level of literacy and digital literacy among learners.
- India's digital divide, exacerbated by disparities in access to technology, internet connectivity, and digital literacy, further marginalises learners who lack foundational skills.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN): Concepts, Challenges, and Implications for AI in Education

- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) refers to the core skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic that enable learners to engage with formal education systems and access knowledge autonomously.
- The 'Big Six' of literacy—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and oral language—are the building blocks of reading proficiency, as identified by literacy educators and research in cognitive psychology.
- Functional illiteracy is distinct from illiteracy; it describes individuals who may have basic reading skills but lack the proficiency to navigate complex texts, such as those encountered in higher education or digital platforms.
- AI tools in education, including generative AI, adaptive learning systems, and automated grading, rely on learners possessing foundational literacy and numeracy to derive meaningful benefits from these technologies.

- The digital divide in India is multidimensional, encompassing disparities in access to devices, internet connectivity, digital literacy, and the ability to critically evaluate AI-generated content.
- The integration of AI in education without addressing foundational literacy gaps risks deepening inequities, as learners who lack basic skills are excluded from the benefits of technological advancements.

Relevance for Prelims

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) · National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 · UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) · Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIEd) · National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat) · Digital Divide · Functional Illiteracy · Phonemic Awareness

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Mission in India: 1. The FLN Mission is a sub-scheme under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. 2. It aims to ensure that every child in India attains foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3. 3. The mission includes components such as teacher training, development of learning materials, and community mobilization. 4. The mission is implemented only in government schools and excludes private schools. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three

4. All

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct as per the official framework of the FLN Mission. Statement 4 is incorrect because the mission is not limited to government schools and includes all schools, including private ones, under its ambit.

Q2. Assertion (A): Artificial Intelligence (AI) can exacerbate the digital divide in education by creating barriers for learners without foundational literacy skills. Reason (R): AI-driven educational tools often require users to read and interpret instructions, which learners without foundational literacy cannot do, thereby excluding them from accessing knowledge. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Both Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and Reason (R) correctly explains Assertion (A). AI tools often assume a baseline of literacy, which learners without foundational skills cannot meet, thereby widening the digital divide.

Mains practice question

 The absence of foundational literacy among learners renders Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in education largely inaccessible, thereby deepening educational inequities. Critically examine this proposition with reference to India's policy framework on education. Also, outline the pedagogical reforms required to bridge the literacy gap in the context of AI-driven learning. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks)

- Define foundational literacy and its components (phonemic awareness,

phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, oral language).

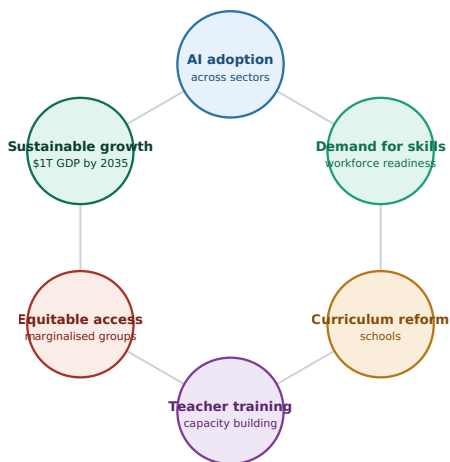
- Highlight the role of AI in modern education and its limitations for learners without foundational literacy.

2. Policy Framework on Education (5 marks)

- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:** Right to free ...

Artificial Intelligence as a Foundational Skill: India's Strategic Imperative in the Age of Intelligent Systems

AI literacy in education



AI literacy in education

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations (Digital Governance, Skill Development) • GS Paper III — Technology, Economic Development, Bio-technology, Environment, Security and Disaster Management (Industry 4.0, Human Resource Development, Technological Disruption)

Why is this in news?

The editorial highlights the urgent need to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy into India's school curriculum, as articulated by

REMEMBER

AI literacy is the new 'Roti, Kapda, Makan'—a foundational skill essential for employability, ethical citizenship, and national competitiveness in the AI-driven 21st century.

Vivek Varshney, founder of SpeEdLabs and STEMlearn.AI. The argument centres on AI's transition from a niche technical domain to a foundational skill, akin to literacy and numeracy, to prevent a future generation of unemployable youth. This shift is underscored by global endorsements from UNESCO and the World Economic Forum, and the rapid penetration of AI-powered applications into daily life, necessitating a re-evaluation of educational frameworks to align with the demands of an AI-driven economy.

Key Points

- The World Economic Forum highlights AI literacy as essential for future education and work.
- UNESCO highlights AI literacy as essential for future education and work.
- The rapid adoption of AI tools—such as chatbots, generative AI, and predictive analytics—across sectors like healthcare, agriculture, and public services necessitates a foundational understanding of AI principles among citizens.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a Foundational Skill?

- AI literacy encompasses the ability to understand, use, and critically evaluate AI technologies, including their principles,

applications, and ethical implications, rather than merely operating AI tools.

- It is analogous to literacy and numeracy in that it is a fundamental competency required across all professions, not limited to engineers or computer scientists.
- The core components of AI literacy include: (a) understanding how intelligent systems work, (b) recognising their limitations and biases, (c) evaluating their outputs critically, and (d) using them responsibly and ethically.
- AI literacy is not about coding or building AI models but about developing analytical and problem-solving skills to navigate an AI-augmented world.
- It bridges the gap between technological advancement and human capability, ensuring that individuals can leverage AI for personal, professional, and societal growth.
- The integration of AI literacy into education aligns with the broader goal of fostering a 'tech-savvy citizenry' capable of participating in a knowledge-based economy.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
AI Literacy as Foundational Skill	Equips students to navigate and utilise AI tools across sectors, reducing unemployability in a tech-driven economy.
Integration with Existing Subjects	Embedding AI concepts into curricula (e.g., mathematics, science) ensures interdisciplinary applicability without overhauling structures.
Focus on Principles over Coding	

Feature	Significance
	Prioritises understanding intelligent systems, ethics, and limitations over technical development, aligning with mass adoption.
Responsible AI Use	Emphasises critical evaluation of AI outputs, bias mitigation, and ethical considerations in decision-making.
Scalable Educational Models	Leverages existing infrastructure (e.g., STEMlearn.AI) to democratise access, avoiding elitism in AI education.
Future-Proofing Workforce	Prepares youth for careers in AI-adjacent fields (e.g., healthcare diagnostics, agricultural automation) beyond traditional tech roles.

Significance for India

- AI-driven productivity gains could add \$1 trillion to India's GDP by 2035, per McKinsey estimates, contingent on workforce readiness.
- Democratising AI literacy mitigates digital divide, ensuring marginalised groups access high-skill economic opportunities.
- India's comparative advantage in AI services (e.g., BPOs, ITES) strengthens if youth possess foundational AI competencies.
- AI adoption in agriculture (e.g., precision farming), healthcare (e.g., diagnostic tools), and logistics (e.g., supply chain optimisation) hinges on grassroots literacy.
- Aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on skill-based education and UNESCO's AI literacy frameworks for sustainable development.

Challenges

- **Curriculum Rigidity** — Existing rote-learning models lack flexibility to incorporate AI as a core skill, risking superficial integration.
- **Teacher Preparedness** — Only 12% of Indian teachers report confidence in teaching AI, per UNESCO 2025 report, highlighting capacity gaps.
- **Infrastructure Divide** — Urban-rural disparities in digital infrastructure (e.g., internet access, device availability) impede equitable AI education.
- **Ethical Dilemmas** — Lack of standardised guidelines on AI ethics in education raises risks of misuse (e.g., deepfake generation by students).

Way Forward

- Integrate AI literacy into school curricula via NEP 2020's subject integration guidelines, with phased rollout from Grades 6–12.
- Establish national AI literacy standards in collaboration with NCERT, UNESCO, and industry bodies (e.g., NASSCOM).
- Launch teacher training programs through DIETs and SCERTs, leveraging platforms like SWAYAM and NPTEL for scalable upskilling.
- Develop low-cost, open-source AI tools (e.g., Scratch-based AI modules) to democratise access in government schools.

Relevance for Prelims

Artificial Intelligence (AI), AI literacy, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Skill India Mission, UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of

AI, World Economic Forum (WEF), STEM education, digital divide, employability skills, Industry 4.0, critical thinking, data literacy

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education: 1. UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have highlighted AI literacy as essential for future education and work. 2. Vivek Varshney argues that India should focus on building the world's largest AI models rather than equipping students with AI literacy. 3. AI education should prepare students to understand the principles of intelligent systems, their possibilities, limitations, and responsible use. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is correct as UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have indeed emphasized AI literacy. Statement 2 is incorrect because Varshney advocates for preparing students to work with AI rather than focusing on model development. Statement 3 is correct as it aligns with his argument for AI education.

Q2. Assertion (A): AI literacy should be treated as a foundational skill in education, akin to literacy and numeracy. Reason (R): AI is becoming integral to daily life and future careers, and students must understand its principles and responsible use. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both

A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

1. A
2. B
3. C
4. D

Answer: A — Both the assertion and reason are true. The reason correctly explains the assertion, as AI's ubiquity and impact on careers necessitate foundational AI literacy.

Mains practice question

 The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education systems is increasingly being advocated as a foundational skill, comparable to literacy and numeracy. Critically examine the rationale behind this proposition, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges. Also, discuss the role of institutions like UNESCO and the World Economic Forum in shaping global AI literacy policies. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks): Define AI literacy and its emergence as a foundational skill. Briefly state the directive—critical examination of the rationale, benefits, challenges, and the role of global institutions.

2. Rationale for AI as Foundational Skill (4 marks):

- AI's ubiquity in daily life and future careers (e.g., healthcare, agriculture, public services). ...

Polity



Section at a glance: Polity

Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Legislative Provisions, Implications, and Constitutional Context for UPSC Civil Services Examination



Mind map: Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Legislative Provisions, Implications, and Constitutional Context for UPSC Civil Services Examination

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Statutory Bodies (Role of Parliament) • GS Paper III — Governance, Transparency and Accountability (Administrative Reforms)

 *The Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 tightens registration timelines for delayed births and deaths, enhancing the accuracy of vital statistics for governance.*

Why is this in news?

The Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was passed by the Lok Sabha on 31 July 2026 amid opposition protests during the Monsoon Session of Parliament. The

Bill amends the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, with the primary objective of tightening timelines for delayed registration of births and deaths and introducing stricter procedural requirements. The passage without debate has sparked discussions on legislative efficiency, parliamentary decorum, and the balance between administrative reform and democratic scrutiny.

PRELIMS POINTER

The Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, governs the registration of births and deaths in India, ensuring that vital statistics are systematically recorded for administrative, legal, and developmental purposes.

Key Points

- The Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, governs the registration of births and deaths in India, ensuring that vital statistics are systematically recorded for administrative, legal, and developmental purposes.
- The Act empowers local authorities and magistrates to register births and deaths, with timelines for registration varying based on the nature of the event and the extent of delay.
- The 1969 Act provides for the registration of births and deaths within specified periods, with penalties for non-compliance, but lacks stringent provisions for cases of extreme delay.

- The amendment aligns with the government's broader agenda of digital governance and real-time data integration, as evidenced by the proposed linkage with the Digital India initiative.
- The opposition's disruption of proceedings underscores broader concerns about legislative transparency and the marginalisation of parliamentary debate in the passage of significant amendments.

What is the Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026?

- The Bill amends the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, to introduce stricter timelines and procedural requirements for the delayed registration of births and deaths.
- The amendment aims to enhance the accuracy and reliability of vital statistics by reducing instances of delayed or non-registration, thereby improving policy planning and resource allocation.
- The amendment seeks to address gaps in the existing legal framework, where delayed registrations often lead to discrepancies in demographic data, affecting welfare schemes and legal entitlements.
- The amendment is part of a broader legislative effort to modernise India's civil registration system, aligning it with global best practices in vital statistics management.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
	Balances administrative feasibility with the need for accurate vital statistics;

Feature	Significance
Extension of registration deadline for delayed births/deaths from 1 year to 2 years	reduces bureaucratic burden while maintaining data integrity.
Requirement of a First-Class Judicial Magistrate's order for registrations delayed beyond 2 years	Introduces judicial oversight to prevent misuse and ensures legal sanctity of delayed registrations.
Retention of existing provisions for registrations delayed up to 1 year	Maintains continuity with the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, ensuring minimal disruption in established procedures.
No change in mandatory timeframe for immediate registration (within 21 days of birth/death)	Preserves the critical window for timely data collection, which is essential for public health planning and welfare schemes.
Prohibition of retrospective amendments to birth/death records without judicial approval	Safeguards against fraudulent alterations and ensures authenticity of vital statistics.

Significance for India

- Enhances the reliability of India's vital statistics system, which is foundational for evidence-based policy formulation in health, education, and social welfare sectors.
- Strengthens the legal framework governing civil registration, reducing ambiguities in delayed registrations.
- Accurate and timely registration of births and deaths is critical for monitoring population dynamics, maternal and infant mortality rates, and disease surveillance.

- Supports the implementation of health schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and Poshan Abhiyaan by providing reliable demographic data.
- Introduces a tiered system of authority (Judicial Magistrate for delays beyond 2 years) to prevent arbitrary or corrupt practices in delayed registrations.

Challenges

- **Implementation and Awareness Gaps** — Low awareness among rural and marginalised communities regarding the revised timelines and procedures for delayed registrations.
- **Judicial and Bureaucratic Delays** — Overburdened judicial system may lead to delays in obtaining First-Class Judicial Magistrate's orders for registrations beyond 2 years.
- **Data Privacy and Security Concerns** — Increased reliance on digital records for delayed registrations raises concerns about data privacy and cybersecurity.
- **Inter-State Coordination and Standardisation** — Variations in state-level implementation of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, may lead to inconsistencies in data collection.

Relevance for Prelims

Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969 · Judicial Magistrate of the First Class · Amendment Bill · Parliamentary Procedure · Constitutional Amendment · Right to Privacy · Data Governance

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969: 1. The Act mandates the registration of

births and deaths within one year of the event. 2. For delayed registration beyond one year, the Act requires the order of a District Magistrate. 3. The Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 proposes to increase the threshold for delayed registration from one year to two years without altering the authority required for such registration. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. None

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 2 are correct as per the existing Act. Statement 3 is incorrect because the Bill proposes that for delayed registration beyond two years, the order of a First-class Judicial Magistrate will be required, whereas for delays up to two years, the existing authorities (District Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, or Executive Magistrate) will continue to apply.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to streamline the registration process by reducing the timeframe for mandatory registration. **Reason (R):** The Bill aims to enhance the accuracy and timeliness of vital statistics for policy formulation and public health interventions. **Options:** A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — The Bill does not reduce the timeframe for mandatory registration but instead tightens the rules for delayed registration by increasing the threshold from one year to two years and introducing stricter procedural requirements. The Reason (R) is correct as a stated

objective of the Bill, but it does not explain the Assertion (A) since the Bill does not shorten the mandatory registration period.

Mains practice question

✍ The Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to amend the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 by introducing stricter provisions for delayed registration. Critically examine the implications of these amendments for administrative efficiency, judicial oversight, and the rule of law in India. Also, assess whether the amendments strike an appropriate balance between procedural rigor and practical accessibility for citizens. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 Marks)

- Briefly state the objective of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 and the purpose of the amendment.
- Highlight the key changes proposed: increase in threshold for delayed registration from one year to two years and introduction of First-class Judicial Magistrate for delays beyond two years. ...

Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026: A Legislative Response to the Crisis of Examination Paper Leaks in India's Education System



Mind map: Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations (Role of Parliament, Electoral Reforms, Judicial Reforms) • GS Paper III — Economy (Human Resource Development, Skill Development, Employment) • GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude (Probity in Governance, Ethical Governance)

Why is this in news?

The Parliament has passed the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, which introduces stringent penalties for examination paper leaks and unfair practices,

following a series of high-profile scandals affecting national-level examinations such as NEET-UG and UGC-NET. The Bill, cleared by the Rajya Sabha, seeks to address a systemic crisis that undermines the credibility of India's education system and the future prospects of millions of students. The Prime Minister's assertion of zero tolerance towards such malpractices underscores the government's commitment to reforming the examination ecosystem through legislative, technological, and institutional interventions.

REMEMBER

The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, proposes a longer jail term and steeper fine for individual exam paper leaks and organised crimes, alongside fast-track courts and technological...

Key Points

- Examination paper leaks have plagued India's education system for decades, with recurring scandals in NEET-UG, JEE Main, UGC-NET, and state-level entrance tests, eroding public trust in competitive examinations.
- The menace has intensified with the rise of organised crime syndicates exploiting digital platforms and insider collusion to manipulate examination outcomes.
- The Supreme Court of India has, in multiple judgments (e.g., *T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka*, 2002), emphasised the need for fair and transparent examination systems to ensure merit-based admissions and appointments.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly highlights the necessity of reforming examination systems to reduce stress and ensure fairness, including the use of technology for secure conduct of examinations.
- The recent walkout by opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha reflects political polarisation over the Bill, despite its bipartisan intent to safeguard student futures.

What is the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026?

- The Bill empowers state governments and Union Territory administrations to designate Sessions Courts as special fast-track courts for expedited trials of offences under the Act, ensuring timely justice.
- It mandates the use of technology, including encrypted question papers, biometric verification, and CCTV surveillance, to prevent malpractices in examination centres.

- The Bill aligns with the government's broader education reforms under NEP 2020, which emphasises transparency, accountability, and the reduction of examination-related stress for students.
- The legislation is part of a multi-pronged strategy that includes the formation of a task force and collaboration with state governments to standardise examination protocols.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Minimum imprisonment of 5 years (extendable to 10 years) for individuals involved in paper leaks	Deters malpractice by imposing severe penalties, ensuring proportional punishment for exam fraud.
Minimum imprisonment of 7 years for organised paper leak syndicates	Targets large-scale, premeditated crimes, disrupting the financial and operational networks of organised cheating rings.
Fine up to ₹50 lakh for individuals and ₹10 crore for organised groups	Acts as a financial deterrent, reducing the economic viability of paper leak operations.
Empowerment of state governments and UTs to designate fast-track courts	Ensures swift justice, reduces pendency, and enhances accountability in legal proceedings.
Amendment to existing anti-paper leak law under the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act	Strengthens the legal framework by addressing gaps in the original legislation, ensuring comprehensive coverage.

Significance for India

- Establishes a robust legal deterrent against exam malpractices, reinforcing the credibility of competitive examinations like UPSC, NEET, and JEE.
- Introduces stringent penalties, reducing the likelihood of judicial delays in high-profile cases.
- Demonstrates a proactive approach by the central government to address systemic failures in examination conduct, particularly in states with recurrent paper leaks.
- Empowers state governments to take ownership of law enforcement, fostering cooperative federalism in tackling malpractices.
- Protects the aspirations of millions of students who invest years of preparation in competitive exams, safeguarding their future opportunities.

Challenges

- **Implementation & Enforcement Gaps** — Risk of inadequate resource allocation to designated fast-track courts, leading to delays despite the legal framework.
- **Technological Vulnerabilities** — Over-reliance on digital systems may introduce new vulnerabilities, such as hacking or data breaches, if not properly secured.
- **Socio-Political Resistance** — Opposition parties may politicise the issue, framing the bill as an attempt to suppress dissent rather than address malpractices.
- **Economic Disparities in Examination Preparation** — Students from economically weaker sections may still face disadvantages if systemic leaks persist, exacerbating inequality in access to opportunities.

Relevance for Prelims

Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 · NEP 2020
· Fast-track courts · Zero tolerance policy · NEET-UG, UGC-NET, JEE
Main · Rajya Sabha voice vote · President's assent · Organised crime in
education sector

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026:

1. It prescribes a minimum jail term of five years for individuals involved in paper leaks. 2. It empowers state governments to designate any court of session as a special fast-track court. 3. It proposes a fine of up to ₹50 lakh for organised crimes related to paper leaks. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is correct (minimum five years). Statement 2 is correct (state governments can designate courts). Statement 3 is incorrect (fine for organised crimes is up to ₹10 crore, not ₹50 lakh).

Q2. Assertion (A): The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, aims to curb malpractices in examinations by prescribing stringent penalties. Reason (R): The bill seeks to establish a credible examination system by leveraging technological interventions and fast-track courts. Codes: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and

R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

1. A
2. B
3. C
4. D

Answer: B — Both A and R are true. The bill prescribes stringent penalties (A) and also emphasizes technological interventions and fast-track courts (R), but R is not the sole or primary reason for the penalties prescribed in A.

Mains practice question

✍️ Critically examine the efficacy of the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, in addressing the menace of paper leaks in examinations. Also, analyse its alignment with the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the challenges in its implementation. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 Marks): Define the menace of paper leaks and its impact on the credibility of examinations and the future of students. Mention the key provisions of the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, such as minimum and maximum jail terms (5-10 years for individuals, 7-10 years for organised ...

Constitutional and Legislative Dimensions of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour

(Amendment) Bill, 2026: Implications for National Symbols and Secular Governance

Vande Mataram Bill

Lok Sabha	Passes Bill 2026
National Song	Vande Mataram 1875 origin
1971 Act	Covers Tiranga Excludes Vande
Amendment	Adds Vande Criminalises insult
Article 51A(a)	Fundamental Duty Respect symbols
Supreme Court	Upholds free speech 1986 ruling

Vande Mataram Bill

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance: Fundamental Duties, Directive Principles of State Policy, and Constitutional Provisions relating to National Symbols • GS Paper II — Polity and Governance: Role of Parliament, Legislative Procedures, and Opposition Dynamics • GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude: National Symbols and Constitutional Morality

 *The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, extends legal protection to *Vande Mataram* by criminalising its intentional insult or disruption, aligning it with the national...*

PRELIMS POINTER

Why is this in news?

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour

(Amendment) Bill, 2026,

which extends legal

protection to the national

song *Vande Mataram* by criminalising its intentional insult or disruption during public gatherings, has been passed by the Lok Sabha amid intense political debate. The legislation, framed as a measure to uphold national honour, has sparked controversy over its potential to infringe upon freedom of expression and its alignment with India's secular constitutional framework. The Bill's passage coincides with broader parliamentary disruptions over allegations of irregularities in national examinations and police action against student protesters, underscoring the intersection of legislative intent, governance, and public sentiment.

The *Vande Mataram* song, composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1875, was adopted as the national song of India in 1937, predating the adoption of the national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, in 1950.

Key Points

- The *Vande Mataram* song, composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1875, was adopted as the national song of India in 1937, predating the adoption of the national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, in 1950.
- The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, originally provided legal protection to the national flag (*Tiranga*) and the national anthem (*Jana Gana Mana*), but did not explicitly include *Vande Mataram*.
- The Constitution of India, under Article 51A(a), imposes a Fundamental Duty upon citizens to abide by the Constitution

and respect its ideals and institutions, including national symbols.

- The Supreme Court of India, in **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala** (1986), upheld the right to freedom of expression even in matters of national symbols, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).
- The Bill's introduction follows widespread public and political discourse on the need to strengthen legal safeguards for national symbols amid incidents of perceived disrespect, particularly in digital and public spaces.
- The Monsoon Session of Parliament has been marked by disruptions over allegations of examination paper leaks, with opposition parties demanding accountability from the Union Home Minister and the government.

What is the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026?

- The Bill amends the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, to include **Vande Mataram** within the ambit of protected national symbols, alongside the national flag and national anthem.
- It criminalises intentional acts of insult, disruption, or prevention of the singing of **Vande Mataram** in public gatherings, with penalties including imprisonment for up to three years, a fine, or both.
- Repeat offenders are liable for a minimum imprisonment of one year, reflecting a graded approach to deterrence.
- The Bill aligns with the government's stated objective of fostering national pride and unity, though critics argue it may encroach upon freedom of expression and artistic liberty.

- The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha via voice vote amid sloganeering and adjourned proceedings, reflecting the polarised political climate.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Title of the Bill	The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 extends legal protection to the national song 'Vande Mataram' by criminalising its intentional insult or disruption of its singing.
Legal Provision	The Bill prescribes punishment of up to three years' imprisonment, a fine, or both for offences related to Vande Mataram, with repeat offenders facing a minimum jail term of one year.
Scope of Protection	The legislation mirrors the existing legal framework for the national anthem, 'Jana Gana Mana', ensuring parity in the protection of national symbols.
Compulsory Singing	The Bill does not mandate the singing of all six stanzas of Vande Mataram, addressing concerns raised by opposition members regarding secularism and federalism.
Parliamentary Passage	The Bill was passed by voice vote in the Lok Sabha amid noisy scenes, marking the first legislation to clear both Houses during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Significance for India

- The amendment reinforces the constitutional commitment to national honour and unity by elevating Vande Mataram to the same legal status as the national anthem.

- It reflects the government's intent to institutionalise cultural symbols as unifying elements in a diverse polity.
- The passage of the Bill in a contentious political environment underscores the government's legislative agenda despite opposition protests, particularly on the NEET paper leak issue.
- It highlights the use of legislative tools to assert cultural nationalism, a recurring theme in recent political discourse.
- The amendment may foster greater public participation in patriotic observances, particularly in educational and public institutions.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026: 1. The Bill extends legal protection to the national song Vande Mataram similar to that of the national anthem Jana Gana Mana. 2. Under the Bill, intentionally preventing the singing of Vande Mataram or disrupting a gathering where it is being sung is a criminal offence punishable with up to three years' imprisonment. 3. The Bill makes all six stanzas of Vande Mataram compulsory to be sung in all public gatherings. 4. Repeat offenders under the Bill face a minimum jail term of one year. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: All four — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Bill does not mandate the singing of all six stanzas of Vande Mataram in public gatherings.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to criminalise insults to Vande Mataram to align it with the legal protection accorded to the national anthem Jana Gana Mana. Reason (R): The Bill aims to restore the cultural and national significance of Vande Mataram by providing it with constitutional safeguards against public disrespect. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. — Both the Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and R correctly explains A as the Bill's objective is to align Vande Mataram's legal protection with that of the national anthem.

Mains practice question

 The Parliament has recently passed the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, extending legal protection to the national song Vande Mataram akin to that of the national anthem. Critically examine the constitutional validity and implications of such legislation in the context of India's secular and

federal ethos. Also, analyse how this move aligns with the broader discourse on national symbols and their legal sanctity. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Constitutional Validity:

- Reference to Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression) and reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).
- Judicial precedents: *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986) on national anthem and *S. Rangarajan v. P. Jagjivan Ram* (1989) on reasonable restrictions.
- Balancing freedom of expression with public order and national ...

Can Unelected Minister Serve Beyond 6 Months? Constitutional Puzzle In Supreme Court



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#) — President's Secretariat (GODL-India)

Can Unelected Minister Serve Beyond 6 Months? Constitutional Puzzle In Supreme Court

The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014: Legislative Response to Supreme Court's De-

allocation Order and Implications for India's Energy Sector



Mind map: The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014: Legislat

GS Paper III — Mineral and Energy Resources • GS Paper III — Government Policies and Interventions for Development in Various Sectors • GS Paper II — Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States

The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014, is a legislative response to the Supreme Court's 2014 order cancelling 204 coal block allocations, mandating competitive auctions to ensure coal supply...

Why is this in news?

The Lok Sabha's passage of the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014, on July 29, 2026, marks a critical legislative response to the Supreme Court's 2014 ruling that cancelled the allocation of 204 coal blocks due to procedural irregularities. The Bill seeks to

PRELIMS POINTER

In 1992, the Government of India identified 143 coal blocks outside the production plans of Coal India Limited (CIL) and Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) for allocation to private entities, aiming to enhance...

facilitate fresh auctions of these de-allocated blocks while addressing concerns of job losses, power supply disruptions, and revenue generation for state governments. The debate surrounding the Bill underscores tensions between centralised resource governance and federal autonomy, as well as the need for transparent and efficient coal sector reforms.

Key Points

- In 1992, the Government of India identified 143 coal blocks outside the production plans of Coal India Limited (CIL) and Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) for allocation to private entities, aiming to enhance coal production and reduce import dependence.
- The allocation process lacked transparency, leading to widespread allegations of corruption and arbitrary allotments, culminating in the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in 2014 (Coal Block Allocation Case) that cancelled 204 coal block allocations due to procedural lapses and lack of competitive bidding.
- The Supreme Court's order necessitated urgent legislative action to prevent disruptions in coal supply, which is critical for India's thermal power generation and industrial sectors, particularly given the country's high dependence on coal for electricity production.
- The Union Government promulgated an Ordinance in 2014 to address the vacuum created by the Supreme Court's order, but a permanent legislative framework was required to formalise the auction process and ensure legal sanctity.
- The Bill also reflects the Centre's intent to strengthen Coal India Limited (CIL) and its subsidiaries, despite opposition

claims that the provisions do not adequately address workers' welfare or sectoral reforms.

- The Opposition's demand for a Departmental Standing Committee review was overridden, highlighting the government's urgency in addressing the Supreme Court's directive and the Opposition's strategic focus on the Rajya Sabha to delay or amend the Bill.

What is the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014?

- The Bill is a legislative mechanism to facilitate the auction of 204 coal blocks de-allocated by the Supreme Court in 2014, ensuring continuity in coal supply for power generation and industrial use.
- It replaces the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Ordinance, 2014, which was promulgated to address the legal vacuum created by the Supreme Court's cancellation of coal block allocations.
- The Bill mandates competitive bidding for the allocation of coal blocks, with a focus on transparency and revenue maximisation for state governments, as coal is a state subject under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- The 'end-use' clause in the Bill allows for flexibility in the utilisation of coal blocks, enabling allocation to entities beyond traditional power and steel sectors, which has drawn criticism for potential discretionary practices.
- The Bill does not propose denationalisation of Coal India Limited (CIL); instead, it aims to strengthen the public sector entity by enhancing its operational and financial viability through strategic auctions.
- The legislation includes provisions for the rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced communities and workers affected

by mining activities, though Opposition members argue these measures are insufficient.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Fresh auction of 204 coal blocks	Addresses Supreme Court's cancellation of allocations, ensuring legal compliance and resumption of mining operations.
End-use clause flexibility	Permits 'any other use as specified by the Central government', raising concerns about discretionary allocation and potential misuse.
Assurance against denationalisation of Coal India Ltd.	Reinforces government's commitment to public sector dominance in coal mining, ensuring stability in supply chains.
Replacement of Ordinance route	Provides legislative backing to the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Ordinance, 2014, ensuring continuity in policy implementation.
Revenue sharing with State governments	Proceeds from coal block auctions will be directed to State exchequers, addressing federal fiscal concerns.

Significance for India

- Revitalises coal supply chains critical for thermal power generation, reducing import dependency and stabilising energy security.
- Generates revenue for State governments through auction proceeds, enhancing fiscal federalism and resource utilisation.

- Complies with Supreme Court directives on coal block allocations, ensuring judicial accountability in resource governance.
- Clarifies legislative framework for coal mining, reducing ambiguity in allocation and operationalisation of blocks.
- Ensures uninterrupted coal supply for thermal power plants, supporting India's energy transition and industrial growth.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014: 1. The Bill seeks to auction 204 coal blocks de-allocated by the Supreme Court. 2. The Bill mandates that all coal blocks must be allocated through reverse auction only. 3. The Bill includes provisions to denationalise Coal India Limited. 4. The Bill defines 'end use' as 'any other use as specified by the Central Government.' How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the Bill allows for differential allocation mechanisms, including reverse auction for regulated entities and revenue maximisation for unregulated entities. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Union Minister explicitly stated that Coal India Limited would not be denationalised.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014, was passed by the Lok Sabha to comply with the Supreme Court's order cancelling the allocation of 204 coal blocks. Reason (R): The

Supreme Court's verdict necessitated urgent legislative action to prevent job losses and ensure power supply in the coal sector. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
3. A is true, but R is false
4. A is false, but R is true

Answer: Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A — Both the Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and R correctly explains A. The Supreme Court's order necessitated legislative action to address the vacuum in coal block allocations, which could have led to job losses and disruptions in power supply.

Mains practice question

 Critically evaluate the provisions of the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014, in the context of India's energy security and federalism. Also, examine the concerns raised regarding discretionary practices in the allocation of coal blocks. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Context and Background: Briefly outline the Supreme Court's 2014 verdict de-allocating 204 coal blocks and the need for legislative action to address the resultant vacuum in coal supply and potential job losses.

2. Provisions of the Bill:

- Auction mechanism for de-allocated coal blocks to ensure transparency and efficiency.
- Differential allocation: ...

The Vikasit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtthan (VBSA) Bill: A Paradigm Shift in Higher Education Governance in India



Mind map: The Vikasit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtthan (VBSA) Bill: A Par

GS Paper II — Governance, Administration and Challenges • GS Paper II — Social Justice and Education • GS Paper III — Human Resource Development and Skill Development

Why is this in news?

The discussion has reignited debates on the efficacy of such structural reforms in addressing systemic challenges in India's higher education sector, including fragmentation, regulatory overlap, and the need for global competitiveness.

REMEMBER

The bill proposes replacing the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE with a single 12-member commission—the Higher Education Commission of India—comprising three councils for regulation, accreditation, and standards-setting, to...

Key Points

- The UGC, established in 1956 under the UGC Act, has historically served as the apex body for the coordination, determination, and maintenance of standards of university education in India.
- The AICTE, constituted in 1987, regulates technical education, including engineering, management, architecture, and pharmacy, while the NCTE, established in 1993, oversees teacher education programmes across the country.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommended the establishment of a single regulator for higher education to eliminate regulatory overlap and enhance autonomy for institutions.
- The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2018, proposed a similar structure but lapsed due to lack of consensus on its provisions, particularly regarding the powers of the regulator and the autonomy of institutions.

What is the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill?

- The bill introduces three distinct councils: (a) the Council for Higher Education Regulation (CHER), responsible for regulating higher education institutions; (b) the Council for Accreditation and Assessment (CAA), tasked with accrediting institutions and programmes; and (c) the Council for Standards and Curriculum (CSC), which sets academic standards and curricula.
- The proposed structure aims to reduce regulatory overlap and fragmentation, which has historically led to bureaucratic delays, inefficiencies, and confusion among educational institutions regarding compliance requirements.

- The bill seeks to enhance the autonomy of higher education institutions by delegating more decision-making powers to them, while simultaneously strengthening accountability through rigorous accreditation and assessment mechanisms.
- The bill includes provisions for the recognition of foreign universities and programmes, aligning India's higher education system with global standards and facilitating student and faculty mobility.
- The bill is expected to play a pivotal role in implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, particularly in areas such as multidisciplinary education, research promotion, and the integration of vocational and liberal education.
- Critics argue that the centralisation of regulatory powers may undermine the autonomy of institutions and create new bottlenecks, while proponents highlight the potential for improved efficiency, transparency, and global competitiveness.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Replacement of UGC, AICTE, and NCTE	Centralises regulatory functions under a single umbrella body (Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan) to streamline governance and reduce bureaucratic overlap.
Three-tier structure: Regulation, Accreditation, Standards	Segregates functions to ensure specialised oversight—regulatory control, quality accreditation, and academic standard-setting—enhancing accountability.
12-member Commission	Balances expertise and representation, potentially including domain experts, educators,

Feature	Significance
	and industry stakeholders for informed policy formulation.
Decentralised councils under central umbrella	Maintains federal flexibility while ensuring national coherence in higher education and teacher education policies.
Focus on 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) alignment	Links educational reforms to national developmental goals, emphasising skilling, employability, and global competitiveness.

Significance for India

- Reduces regulatory fragmentation by consolidating three apex bodies into one commission, minimising jurisdictional conflicts and administrative delays.
- Enhances coherence in policy implementation across higher education, technical education, and teacher training sectors.
- Specialised accreditation and standards-setting councils can strengthen quality benchmarks in institutions.
- Encourages self-regulation with external oversight, balancing autonomy and accountability in higher education institutions.
- Centralised focus on 'Viksit Bharat' goals may prioritise industry-relevant curricula and vocational training.

Challenges

- **Regulatory Overlap & Transition Risks** — Risk of temporary disruption during the merger of UGC, AICTE, and NCTE functions into the new commission.

- **Autonomy vs. Accountability Trade-off** — Balancing institutional autonomy with stringent regulatory oversight remains a persistent challenge.
- **Resource Constraints & Capacity Building** — Limited fiscal and human resources may hinder effective functioning of the new commission and councils.
- **Stakeholder Resistance & Implementation Gaps** — Possible resistance from existing bodies (UGC, AICTE, NCTE) due to loss of autonomy and turf issues.

Way Forward

- Constitute the 12-member commission with domain experts and balanced representation from academia, industry, and government.
- Draft and notify detailed rules for the functioning of the three councils (regulation, accreditation, standards) within six months of the bill's enactment.
- Establish a dedicated transition task force to oversee the merger of UGC, AICTE, and NCTE, ensuring minimal disruption to ongoing processes.
- Develop a phased implementation plan for accreditation reforms, starting with a pilot in select states or institutions.

Relevance for Prelims

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 · UGC Act, 1956 · AICTE Act, 1987 · NCTE Act, 1993 · Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) · Regulatory bodies in education · Accreditation agencies in India · National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill 2025: 1. The VBSA Bill seeks to replace the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE with a single 12-member Commission. 2. The proposed Commission will have three separate councils for regulation, accreditation, and standards-setting. 3. The Bill was introduced in the Parliament during the Winter Session of 2024. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 and 2 are correct as per the Bill's provisions. Statement 3 is incorrect; the Bill was introduced in December 2025, not during the Winter Session of 2024.

Q2. Assertion (A): The VBSA Bill proposes a unified regulatory framework for higher education in India. Reason (R): The Bill aims to consolidate the functions of UGC, AICTE, and NCTE into a single Commission to enhance coherence and reduce regulatory overlap. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. — Both Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and Reason (R) correctly

explains Assertion (A) as the Bill's primary objective is to unify higher education regulation.

Mains practice question

✍ Critically examine the institutional design of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill 2025 in the context of India's higher education governance. How does the proposed separation of powers among the three councils (regulation, accreditation, and standards-setting) address the challenges of regulatory multiplicity and autonomy in higher education institutions? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

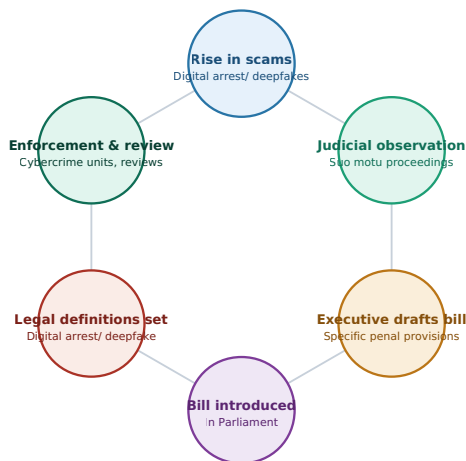
1. Introduction (2 marks)

- Context: Fragmented higher education governance under UGC, AICTE, and NCTE leading to regulatory overlap and inefficiencies.
- Objective of VBSA Bill: Replace three bodies with a single 12-member Commission to streamline regulation.

2. Institutional Design of VBSA (4 marks)

- Composition: 12-member Commission (include ex-officio members, academicians, and ...)

Legislative Response to Digital Harassment: Criminalising Digital Arrests and AI-Generated Deepfakes

Digital crime response loop

Digital crime response loop

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations (Cyber Governance, Digital Security) • GS Paper III — Science and Technology (Emerging Technologies, Cyber Security, AI Governance)

The proposed Bill aims to criminalise digital arrests and AI-generated deepfakes by introducing specific offences, stringent penalties, and asset-freezing provisions, addressing critical gaps in...

Why is this in news?

The Supreme Court, in suo motu proceedings on digital arrest scams, highlighted the inadequacy of existing criminal laws to address emerging digital crimes,

PRELIMS POINTER

The proliferation of digital arrest scams, where victims are coerced into paying ransom under the threat of fabricated legal consequences, has surged in recent years, exploiting the fear of arrest to extort money.

particularly those involving AI-generated deepfakes and coercive digital arrest tactics. This development is significant for UPSC aspirants as it intersects with governance, cybersecurity, and constitutional law, reflecting the judiciary's proactive stance on digital governance.

Key Points

- The proliferation of digital arrest scams, where victims are coerced into paying ransom under the threat of fabricated legal consequences, has surged in recent years, exploiting the fear of arrest to extort money.
- AI-generated deepfakes, capable of creating hyper-realistic synthetic media, have been weaponised for impersonation, misinformation, and financial fraud, posing unprecedented challenges to law enforcement and societal trust.
- Existing legal frameworks, such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Indian Penal Code, 1860, lack specific provisions to address the unique nature of digital arrests and AI-driven misinformation, necessitating bespoke legislation.

What are Digital Arrests and AI-Generated Deepfakes?

- **Digital Arrests**: A form of cyber extortion where fraudsters impersonate law enforcement or judicial authorities to coerce victims into paying ransom under the false pretext of pending legal action. Victims are often threatened with immediate arrest, coercion, or harm to family members, exploiting psychological pressure.
- **AI-Generated Deepfakes**: Synthetic media created using artificial intelligence to mimic real individuals' voices, images, or videos with high accuracy. Deepfakes are deployed for impersonation, misinformation, financial fraud, and

defamation, posing risks to personal security, electoral integrity, and institutional credibility.

- **Modus Operandi of Digital Arrest Scams**: Fraudsters use spoofed calls, SMS, or social media messages to impersonate officials, demand ransom via digital payment platforms, and threaten victims with fabricated legal consequences, including arrest warrants or property seizures.
- **AI-Generated Deepfake Threats**: Deepfakes can be used to create fake news, impersonate public figures, or manipulate financial transactions, undermining trust in institutions and enabling large-scale fraud, including in banking and e-commerce sectors.
- **Legal Gaps**: Existing laws, such as Section 66C (identity theft) and Section 66D (cheating by personation) of the IT Act, do not adequately address the specific harms of digital arrests or the unique challenges posed by AI-generated content, necessitating targeted legislation.
- **Judicial Concerns**: The Supreme Court has highlighted that digital arrest scams often involve organised crime, extortion, and impersonation, requiring stringent penalties and asset-freezing provisions to deter offenders and compensate victims.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Criminalisation of digital arrests	Establishes a distinct legal framework to address cyber-enabled extortion and organised fraud, addressing a lacuna in existing penal laws.

Feature	Significance
AI-generated deepfakes as separate offence	Provides specific penalties for synthetic media misuse, preventing identity theft, impersonation, and misinformation campaigns.
Asset freezing provisions	Enables judicial restraint of proceeds from digital arrest scams, disrupting organised crime networks and reducing recidivism.
Exclusion of Article 142 powers for defining offences	Clarifies the constitutional separation of powers, reserving legislative authority for Parliament rather than the judiciary.
Inter-departmental committee coordination	Facilitates multi-agency action to identify systemic gaps and implement preventive measures across digital platforms.

Significance for India

- Fills critical gaps in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Information Technology Act (2000), and related statutes by introducing precise definitions of 'digital arrest' and 'deepfake' for judicial application.
- Aligns with global trends in cybercrime legislation, such as the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act and Singapore's Protection from Harassment Act, enhancing India's compliance with international standards.
- Demonstrates proactive judicial-legislative collaboration, as the Supreme Court's suo motu observations catalysed executive action to draft specific penal provisions.
- Highlights the judiciary's role in identifying legislative lacunae while respecting the constitutional mandate for Parliament to define offences.

- Addresses the dual challenge of regulating emerging technologies (AI, deepfakes) while preserving innovation in digital platforms.

Challenges

- **DEFINITIONAL AMBIGUITY IN 'DIGITAL ARREST'** — The absence of a statutory definition may lead to interpretative disputes, as digital arrest scams vary widely (e.g., fake police calls, virtual kidnappings).
- **ENFORCEMENT GAPS IN CYBERCRIME INVESTIGATIONS** — Limited forensic capabilities in state cyber cells to trace AI-generated deepfakes and digital arrest perpetrators across jurisdictions.
- **TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTABILITY OF OFFENDERS** — Perpetrators may exploit loopholes in the new law by migrating to encrypted platforms or using decentralised tools (e.g., blockchain-based scams).
- **JURISDICTIONAL CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL CRIMES** — Digital arrest scams often originate from foreign jurisdictions (e.g., call centres in Southeast Asia), complicating extradition and prosecution.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding digital arrests and AI-generated deepfakes: 1. Digital arrest scams involve elements of extortion, robbery, and organised crime. 2. The Supreme Court can, under Article 142 of the Constitution, define a new criminal offence. 3. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, specifically criminalises digital arrests. 4. The proposed Bill aims to

classify AI-generated deepfakes as a separate criminal offence.
How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the Supreme Court cannot define a new criminal offence under Article 142. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, does not address digital arrests.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court has directed the CBI to investigate digital arrest cases across the country. Reason (R): The Supreme Court has suo motu taken cognisance of digital arrest scams and observed the need for specific penal laws to address such crimes. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is NOT the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Both the assertion and reason are true. The Supreme Court has indeed directed the CBI to investigate digital arrest cases, and the suo motu cognisance was taken to address the lack of specific penal laws for such crimes.

Mains practice question

 The Supreme Court has observed that existing criminal laws do not adequately address the menace of digital arrests and AI-generated deepfakes. In this context, critically analyse the necessity and constitutional validity of introducing a new

legislative framework to criminalise these offences. Also, examine the implications of such a framework on the balance between judicial activism and parliamentary sovereignty. (15 Marks)

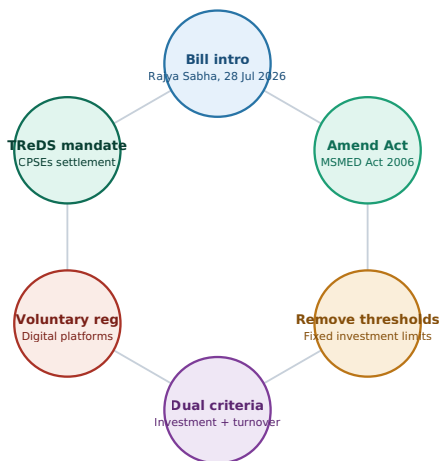
Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Context and Problem Statement: Define digital arrests and AI-generated deepfakes; highlight their rise and societal impact (extortion, impersonation, organised crime). Cite the Supreme Court's suo motu observations in the present case.

2. Gaps in Existing Laws:

- IPC (Sections 383-389 for extortion, 417-420 for cheating, 465-477 for forgery).
- IT Act, 2000 ...

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Rationalising MSME Policy for Ease of Doing Business and Payment Security

MSME Bill 2026 Process

MSME Bill 2026 Process

GS Paper II — Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors • GS Paper III — Issues related to MSMEs, Ease of Doing Business, and Financial Inclusion

Why is this in news?

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 28 July 2026 to amend the Micro, Small and Medium

Enterprises Development Act, 2006. The Bill seeks to modernise the MSME classification framework, streamline registration processes, and enhance payment security for MSMEs through mandatory settlement via the TReDS platform. It also introduces stricter timelines for dispute

REMEMBER

The Bill replaces rigid investment-based MSME classification with a dual criteria of investment and turnover, mandates TReDS-based invoice settlement by CPSEs, and imposes strict 90-day timelines for mediation and...

resolution and partial decriminalisation of minor offences to improve the business environment for MSMEs.

Key Points

- The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 was enacted to facilitate the promotion and development of MSMEs, which contribute significantly to India's GDP, employment, and exports.
- MSMEs account for approximately 30% of India's GDP and 45% of manufacturing output, playing a pivotal role in inclusive growth and regional development.
- The existing classification of MSMEs is based solely on investment in plant and machinery or equipment, with rigid thresholds that do not account for dynamic business models or inflation.
- Payment delays from large buyers, including government entities, have historically posed a critical challenge for MSMEs, affecting their liquidity and operational sustainability.
- The Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS), launched in 2014, is an RBI-regulated electronic platform designed to facilitate discounting of trade receivables for MSMEs, thereby improving cash flow.
- The 2020 Atmanirbhar Bharat Package introduced several reforms for MSMEs, including the revision of classification criteria and the inclusion of turnover as an additional parameter.

What is the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026?

- The Bill seeks to amend the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 to align the policy framework with contemporary economic realities and ease of doing business imperatives.
- It introduces a dual classification criterion for MSMEs based on (i) investment in plant and machinery or equipment and (ii) turnover, with thresholds to be notified by the central government, replacing the existing rigid investment-based thresholds.
- The Bill makes the filing of memoranda for MSME registration voluntary for all enterprises, replacing the current requirement for medium enterprises in manufacturing to file a memorandum with a specified authority.
- It mandates the settlement of all invoices for procurement of goods or services from MSMEs by central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) through the TReDS platform, with the central and state governments empowered to extend this mandate to other public sector entities.
- The Bill introduces strict timelines for dispute resolution: mediation must be completed within 90 days from the first appearance, and arbitration awards must be made within 90 days from the completion of pleadings, with references to arbitration required within 30 days of mediation termination.
- A digital platform for MSME registration will be notified by the central government, with state governments also empowered to notify similar platforms for voluntary registration.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Reclassification Criteria for MSMEs	Removes fixed investment thresholds and introduces dual criteria of investment and turnover, enabling dynamic classification and reducing administrative rigidity.
Voluntary Memorandum Filing	Shifts registration from mandatory to voluntary, reducing compliance burden while maintaining data availability through a centralised digital platform.
Mandatory TReDS Settlement for CPSEs	Enforces electronic invoice discounting for MSME payments, ensuring timely liquidity and reducing payment delays in public procurement.
Strict Mediation and Arbitration Timelines	Imposes 90-day mediation and 30-day arbitration deadlines, accelerating dispute resolution and improving cash flow for MSMEs.
Decriminalisation Provisions (Partial)	Reduces penal consequences for procedural lapses, aligning with ease-of-doing-business reforms while maintaining accountability for fraudulent practices.

Significance for India

- Enhances MSME competitiveness by simplifying classification and reducing compliance costs, critical for India's 30% GDP contribution from MSMEs.
- Improves liquidity through mandatory TReDS adoption, addressing the ₹10.7 lakh crore delayed payment crisis reported by the RBI in 2023.

- Reduces regulatory friction via voluntary registration and digital platforms, lowering entry barriers for new entrepreneurs.
- Streamlines dispute resolution timelines, mitigating the 45% of MSMEs citing payment delays as a major operational challenge (MSME Annual Report 2022-23).
- Mandates TReDS for CPSEs, ensuring MSMEs receive timely payments, a long-standing demand under the 'MSME Procurement Policy' (2012).

Way Forward

- Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns for TReDS and digital platform registration, leveraging MSME-Development Institutes (MSME-DIs) and local industry associations.
- Establish a centralised grievance redressal mechanism for MSMEs facing TReDS non-compliance by CPSEs.
- Develop sector-specific turnover thresholds to prevent misclassification of labour-intensive MSMEs.
- Strengthen cybersecurity protocols for digital platforms, including mandatory audits and real-time monitoring.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026: 1. The Bill removes the investment thresholds for classifying enterprises as MSMEs and introduces turnover as an additional criterion. 2. The Bill mandates that all central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) must settle invoices for procurement from MSMEs through the TReDS platform. 3. The Bill requires mediation of payment disputes to be completed within 90 days from the date

of first appearance. 4. The Bill decriminalises all offences under the MSME Development Act, 2006. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct as per the Bill's provisions. Statement 4 is incorrect because the Bill only decriminalises certain offences, not all.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026 introduces a voluntary registration system for MSMEs. Reason (R): The Bill seeks to reduce compliance burdens and promote ease of doing business for MSMEs by making registration optional for all categories of MSMEs. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. — Both A and R are true, and R correctly explains A. The Bill indeed makes registration voluntary to reduce compliance burdens.

Mains practice question

 **The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Amendment) Bill, 2026** seeks to redefine the classification, registration, and dispute resolution mechanisms for MSMEs in India. Critically examine the key provisions of the Bill and analyse its potential impact on the ease of doing business for MSMEs. Also, discuss the implications of mandatory settlement of invoices through TReDS for central public sector enterprises (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: 1. Classification of MSMEs: Critically examine the removal of investment thresholds and introduction of turnover as a criterion. Discuss how this aligns with global best practices (e.g., EU's SME definition) and its impact on inclusivity vs. administrative complexity.

2. Registration Mechanism: Analyse the shift to voluntary registration. Discuss how this reduces compliance burdens while potentially ...

Constitutional and Practical Challenges in the Implementation of the Tenth Schedule: A Judicial and Legislative Analysis



Mind map: Constitutional and Practical Challenges in the Implement

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance (Constitutional Provisions, Parliament, Judicial Review) • GS Paper IV — Ethics and Integrity in Governance (Role of Legislators, Ethical Dilemmas in Defections)

✎ The Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, introduced to curb political defections, faces systemic challenges in enforcement due to ambiguous provisions like the merger exception (Paragraph 4), which...

Why is this in news?

The Supreme Court, while admitting a petition filed by senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal, highlighted the 'enormous issues' in the enforcement of the anti-defection law (Tenth Schedule) and directed that the case be tagged with a pending challenge concerning political defections in Goa. The bench observed that the law's deficiencies are 'the making of the members of Parliament' and questioned its interpretation, particularly the merger exception under Paragraph 4, which allows legislators to escape disqualification by joining a new political group or leaving the party.

PRELIMS POINTER

The Tenth Schedule, inserted by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, was introduced to curb the menace of political defections and maintain stability in governance by disqualifying legislators who violate party discipline.

Key Points

- The Tenth Schedule, inserted by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, was introduced to curb the menace of political defections and maintain stability in governance by disqualifying legislators who violate party discipline.

- The Schedule empowers the Speaker of the House to decide on disqualification petitions, a provision that has often been criticised for its lack of neutrality and susceptibility to political influence.
- Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule provides an exception to disqualification in cases of a 'merger' of political parties, requiring a two-thirds threshold of the party's legislators to approve the merger. This provision has been exploited to legitimise large-scale defections, as seen in recent political crises in states like Goa, Maharashtra, and Karnataka.
- The Supreme Court has previously upheld the validity of the Tenth Schedule in the landmark case of **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu** (1992), which ruled that the Speaker's decision is subject to judicial review only on grounds of malafide or violation of constitutional provisions.
- Recent political developments, including engineered defections and the use of the merger exception to topple governments, have reignited debates on the efficacy and ethical implications of the anti-defection law.
- The Goa political defections case, currently pending before a three-judge bench, involves allegations of mass defections facilitated by the merger exception, further exposing the law's vulnerabilities.

What is the Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule)?

- The Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India, popularly known as the Anti-Defection Law, was inserted by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, to prevent legislators from switching political parties for personal or political gains.
- It applies to both Parliament and State Legislatures and disqualifies members who voluntarily give up their party

membership, vote or abstain from voting contrary to party directives, or join another political party.

- The law empowers the Speaker of the House to decide on disqualification petitions, a provision criticised for its potential bias, as Speakers are often affiliated with ruling parties.
- Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule mandates disqualification for legislators who defy party whips, while Paragraph 4 provides an exception for cases of a 'merger' of political parties, requiring a two-thirds majority of the party's legislators to approve the merger.
- The merger exception has been widely criticised for enabling large-scale defections, as legislators can escape disqualification by claiming they are part of a merged entity, even if the merger is politically motivated.
- The law was upheld by the Supreme Court in **Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu** (1992), which ruled that the Speaker's decision is subject to judicial review only on grounds of malafide or violation of constitutional provisions.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule	Permits legislators to avoid disqualification by claiming protection under the merger provision, requiring a two-thirds threshold and allowing members to either join the new group or leave.
Supreme Court's observation on 'enormous issues'	Highlights systemic flaws in the implementation of the anti-defection law, particularly the misuse of the merger exception to engineer defections.
Article 32 of the Constitution	Allows the Supreme Court to entertain petitions challenging violations of fundamental rights,

Feature	Significance
	including those arising from anti-defection law misinterpretations.
Pending Goa political defections case	A similar challenge to the anti-defection law's enforcement, tagged with the current petition for consolidated hearing.
Two-thirds threshold for party mergers	Ensures that only substantial political realignments are exempt from disqualification, but its enforcement remains contentious.

Relevance for Prelims

Tenth Schedule of the Constitution · Anti-Defection Law · Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule · Article 32 of the Constitution · Speaker's role in disqualification · Political party merger provisions · Goa political defections case · Engineered defections

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution: 1. It was inserted by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985. 2. It provides for the disqualification of members of Parliament and state legislatures on the ground of defection. 3. The decision of the Speaker regarding disqualification under the Tenth Schedule is subject to judicial review. 4. The Tenth Schedule allows a legislator to escape disqualification if two-thirds of the party members agree to a merger with another party. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three

4. All

Answer: All — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is also correct as the Supreme Court in Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992) held that the Speaker's decision under the Tenth Schedule is subject to judicial review.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court in its recent observations on the anti-defection law has held that the law was framed by Parliament itself and issues arising from it should be addressed by legislators. Reason (R): The anti-defection law aims to maintain the stability of governments by preventing legislators from switching parties arbitrarily. Options:

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: A is true, but R is false. — Both A and R are true. However, R does not explain A, as the Supreme Court's observation pertains to the enforcement challenges of the law rather than its purpose.

Mains practice question

 The Supreme Court's recent observations on the enforcement challenges of the anti-defection law highlight systemic deficiencies in its implementation. Critically examine the efficacy of the Tenth Schedule in maintaining the integrity of legislative processes and electoral mandates in India. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

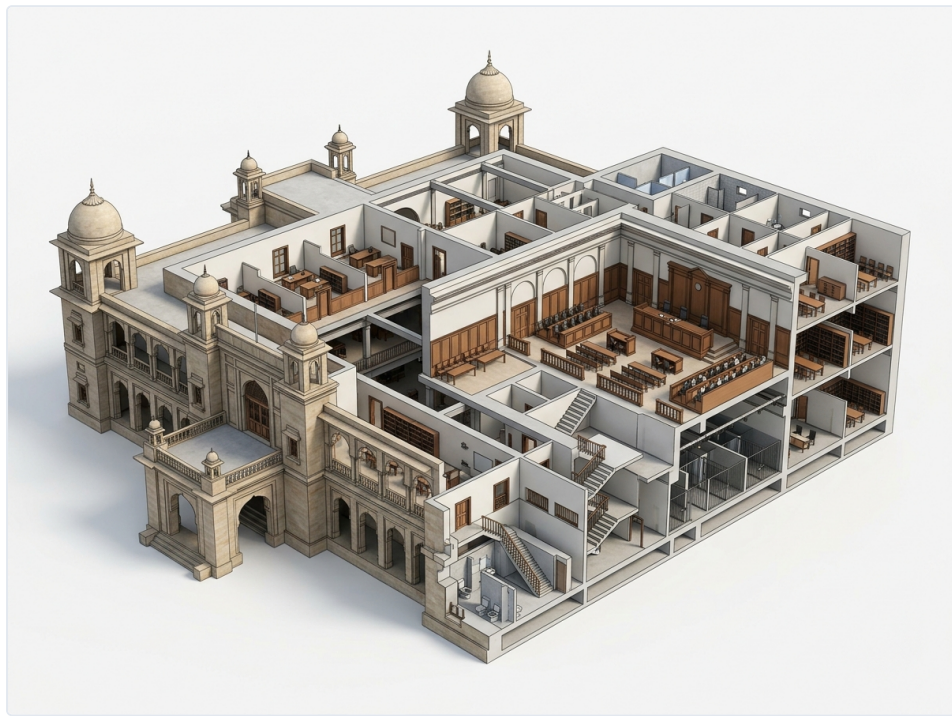
1. Introduction: Briefly define the anti-defection law (Tenth Schedule)

and its constitutional basis (52nd Amendment Act, 1985). State its primary objectives: preventing horse-trading, ensuring party discipline, and preserving electoral mandates.

2. Provisions of the Tenth Schedule:

- Paragraph 2(1)(a): Disqualification for voluntarily giving up party membership.
- Paragraph 3: Disqualification for voting/abstaining contrary ...

Constitutional Right to Voluntary Religious Conversion and Inter-Faith Marriage: Judicial Affirmation of Personal Liberty and Autonomy



3D cutaway: High Court

High Court · Single-judge bench · Habeas corpus petition · Fundamental rights · Constitutional Articles · Judicial autonomy

GS Paper II — Fundamental Rights (Articles 25, 26, 29, 30) • GS Paper III — Social Justice and Welfare (Freedom of Religion) • GS Paper IV — Ethics — Individual Liberty vs Social Harmony

Why is this in news?

The Allahabad High Court, in a landmark judgment delivered on 31 July 2026, reaffirmed that the right to voluntarily convert one's religion and to choose a

REMEMBER

The Allahabad High Court's judgment reaffirms that voluntary religious conversion and inter-faith marriage are constitutionally protected rights under Articles 21 and 25, and courts must ensure that such decisions are...

spouse of one's own free will is a fundamental constitutional right protected under Articles 25 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The ruling was pronounced by a single-judge bench of Justice Sandeep Jain while adjudicating a habeas corpus petition filed by two adult sisters from Agra who alleged coercion by their father to prevent their religious conversion and inter-faith marriages. The Court directed the state government and police authorities to produce the sisters on 6 August 2026 to ascertain their free will and current status, underscoring the judiciary's role in safeguarding individual autonomy against familial or institutional coercion.

Key Points

- The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion under Article 25(1), subject to public order, morality, and health.
- The **Puttaswamy Judgment** (2017) established that personal autonomy is a facet of the right to life and liberty under Article 21, extending to decisions regarding religion, marriage, and lifestyle choices.
- Family courts and high courts frequently adjudicate habeas corpus petitions involving adult individuals alleged to be under coercion, particularly in cases of inter-faith relationships or religious conversions.

What is the Constitutional Framework Governing Religious Conversion and Inter-Faith Marriage?

- ****Article 25(1)**:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health. This right includes the

freedom to change one's religion, as affirmed in **Stanley v. State of Gujarat** (1977).

- **Article 21**: Ensures the right to life and personal liberty, which the Supreme Court has interpreted to include the right to privacy, autonomy, and freedom of choice in matters of marriage and religion (**Puttaswamy v. Union of India**, 2017).
- **Right to Privacy and Autonomy**: The Supreme Court has held that personal decisions, including those related to religion and marriage, are protected under the right to privacy, which is intrinsic to the right to life and liberty (**K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India**, 2017).
- **Habeas Corpus Jurisprudence**: High courts and the Supreme Court have consistently held that habeas corpus petitions can be filed by adults alleging coercion or unlawful detention, even by family members, to secure their personal freedom (**Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra**, 1983).
- **Inter-Faith Marriages**: The Supreme Court has recognised that adults have the right to marry a person of their choice, irrespective of religion, caste, or community, and such marriages are legally valid (**Shakti Vahini v. Union of India**, 2018).
- **Judicial Safeguards Against Coercion**: Courts are empowered to examine whether an individual's decision to convert or marry is voluntary or the result of undue influence, duress, or fraud, and may intervene to protect the individual's autonomy.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Constitutional right to convert and marry	Affirms Articles 25(1) and 21, ensuring personal liberty and freedom of conscience.
Protection against coercion	Highlights judicial scrutiny to prevent forced conversions or undue influence.
Adult autonomy in personal decisions	Reinforces the principle that adults possess full legal capacity for self-determination.
Habeas corpus jurisdiction	Demonstrates the court's role in safeguarding individual liberty against illegal detention.
Judicial balancing of rights	Balances parental concerns with individual rights in matters of faith and marriage.

Significance for India

- The ruling reaffirms the supremacy of constitutional rights over societal or familial pressures in personal matters.
- It sets a precedent for judicial intervention in cases where adult women's autonomy is allegedly compromised.
- Highlights the evolving judicial approach toward women's agency in matters of faith and marriage.
- Underscores the need for societal awareness regarding the rights of adult individuals in interfaith or inter-caste unions.
- Adds to the jurisprudence on habeas corpus petitions involving adult women asserting personal autonomy.

Challenges

- **Balancing Individual Autonomy and Parental Rights** — Societal norms often prioritize parental authority over individual choice, leading to conflicts.
- **Preventing Coercive Practices** — Instances of forced conversions or marriages under familial pressure remain a persistent challenge.
- **Legal Ambiguities in Interfaith Marriages** — Lack of uniform laws governing interfaith marriages creates jurisdictional and procedural complexities.
- **Public Perception and Backlash** — Rulings affirming individual rights may face resistance from conservative sections of society.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the constitutional right to freedom of religion in India: 1. Article 25 guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion. 2. The right to propagate religion includes the right to convert others by force or inducement. 3. The Supreme Court in the case of *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977) upheld the validity of anti-conversion laws. 4. The right to freedom of religion is subject to public order, morality, and health. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All

Answer: All — Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the right to propagate religion does not include the right to convert others by force or inducement, as held in various judicial precedents including *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977).

Q2. Assertion (A): The right to marry a person of one's choice is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

Reason (R): The Supreme Court in the case of *Shafin Jahan v.*

Asokan K.M. & Ors. (2018) recognized the right to marry a person of one's choice as an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. — Both the Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and the Reason (R) correctly explains the Assertion (A) as the Supreme Court in *Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. & Ors.* (2018) explicitly recognized the right to marry a person of one's choice as part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21.

Mains practice question

 The Allahabad High Court has recently reaffirmed that the decision to voluntarily convert to another religion and to marry a person of one's choice is a constitutional right of an adult individual. Critically examine this judicial assertion in the context of the right to freedom of religion (Article 25) and the right to life

and personal liberty (Article 21). Also, analyse the balance between individual autonomy and parental authority in such matters. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks)

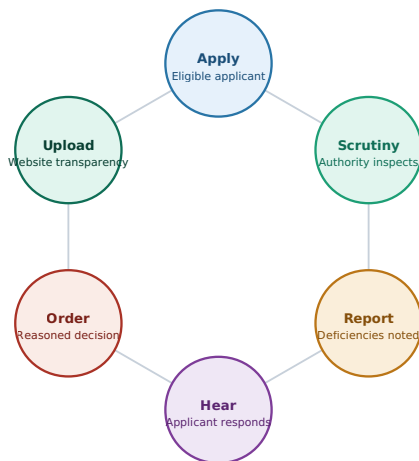
- Briefly state the Allahabad High Court's ruling and its context (voluntary conversion and marriage by adult women).
- Mention the constitutional provisions involved: Article 25 (freedom of religion) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty).

2. Right to Freedom of Religion (Article 25) (3 marks)

- ...

Constitutional Imperatives in Caste Certificate Issuance: Procedural Fairness and Transparency in Administrative Decisions

Caste certificate process



Caste certificate process

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Statutory Bodies (Judicial Review, Administrative Law) • GS Paper II — Fundamental Rights (Article 14, 21) • GS Paper IV — Governance (Transparency, Accountability)

✍ Caste certificate issuance must adhere to constitutional principles of fairness, transparency, and due process; arbitrary rejections without reasons are unconstitutional and violate Articles 14 and...

Why is this in news?

The Allahabad High Court, in a recent judgment, held that the rejection of a caste certificate application without assigning cogent reasons and without providing a copy of the order

to the applicant is unconstitutional. The court underscored the necessity of procedural fairness, transparency, and adherence to due process in administrative decisions concerning caste certificates, which are critical for accessing affirmative action benefits under the Constitution.

PRELIMS POINTER

Caste certificates are official documents issued by state governments to individuals belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) for availing reservation benefits in...

Key Points

- Caste certificates are official documents issued by state governments to individuals belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) for availing reservation benefits in education, employment, and political representation.

- The issuance of caste certificates is governed by state-specific rules and procedures, often involving scrutiny by revenue officials or designated authorities.
- Historically, caste certificates have been a subject of litigation due to procedural lapses, arbitrary rejections, and delays, leading to deprivation of constitutional rights.
- The Constitution of India, through Articles 14, 15(4), 16(4), and 341-342, mandates the state to provide affirmative action to historically marginalised communities.
- Administrative decisions, including those on caste certificates, are subject to judicial review under Article 226 of the Constitution, ensuring compliance with principles of natural justice.
- The Supreme Court, in multiple judgments (e.g., *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India*), has emphasised the importance of procedural fairness in reservation-related matters.

What is a Caste Certificate and Why is its Issuance Procedurally Significant?

- A caste certificate is a documentary proof issued by competent authorities to individuals belonging to SCs, STs, or OBCs, certifying their caste status for the purpose of availing reservation benefits.
- Caste certificates are essential for accessing educational institutions, government jobs, and political reservations, which are constitutionally guaranteed under Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 341-342.
- The issuance process involves verification of caste records, field enquiries, and scrutiny by revenue officials or designated authorities, as per state-specific rules (e.g., Uttar Pradesh Caste Certificate Rules, 1950).

- Procedural fairness in caste certificate issuance is rooted in constitutional principles of equality (Article 14), fair procedure (Article 21), and non-arbitrariness, as held by the Supreme Court in **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India**.
- The Allahabad High Court's recent judgment reinforces the requirement for administrative authorities to provide detailed reasons for rejection, a copy of the order, and an opportunity to rectify deficiencies, aligning with the principles of natural justice.
- Transparency in the process is critical to prevent arbitrary denials, which can lead to denial of constitutional rights and exacerbate social inequalities.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Mandatory reasoned order for rejection	Ensures administrative accountability and prevents arbitrary denial of caste certificates, upholding Article 14 (Right to Equality).
Provision of order copy to applicant	Facilitates transparency and enables the applicant to seek legal recourse if necessary.
Opportunity for objections on inspection report	Allows applicants to address deficiencies before final rejection, reducing procedural injustice.
Time-bound completion of process (within two months)	Prevents undue delays in the issuance of caste certificates, a critical document for reservation benefits.
Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) formulation	Ensures uniformity and consistency in the processing of caste certificate applications across districts.

Significance for India

- The judgment reinforces the constitutional guarantee of equality before law (Article 14) by curbing arbitrary rejection of caste certificates.
- It mandates adherence to principles of natural justice, including the right to be heard and reasoned decisions.
- Promotes transparency and accountability in the issuance of caste certificates, a key document for availing reservation benefits.
- Reduces discretionary powers of administrative authorities, minimizing corruption and malpractice.
- Facilitates equitable access to reservation benefits for marginalized communities by ensuring timely issuance of caste certificates.

Challenges

- **Implementation and Compliance** — Ensuring that all administrative authorities across districts adhere to the judgment's directives without selective implementation.
- **Digital Divide and Accessibility** — Ensuring that applicants, particularly from rural or marginalized backgrounds, can access inspection reports and orders online or through other means.
- **Resource Constraints** — Allocating sufficient manpower and infrastructure to process caste certificate applications within the stipulated timeframe.
- **Legal Recourse and Delays** — Balancing the need for thorough scrutiny with the urgency of issuing caste certificates to avoid delays in availing reservation benefits.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the issuance of caste certificates in India: 1. The Constitution does not guarantee a right to a reasoned order in administrative decisions. 2. The Allahabad High Court has held that rejection of a caste certificate application without providing reasons is unconstitutional. 3. The Right to Information Act, 2005, does not apply to the process of issuing caste certificates. 4. Administrative authorities must provide a copy of the rejection order within seven days of the decision. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All

Answer: Only three — Statements 2 and 4 are correct. Statement 1 is incorrect as the Constitution, through Article 14 and 21, guarantees procedural fairness and reasoned decisions. Statement 3 is incorrect as RTI applies to all administrative processes, including caste certificate issuance.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Allahabad High Court has directed that the entire process of issuing a caste certificate must be completed within two months of the application date. Reason (R): This directive is aimed at ensuring timely delivery of social justice to marginalised communities. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A

3. A is true, but R is false

4. A is false, but R is true

Answer: A is true, but R is false — Both A and R are true, but R is not the sole or correct explanation of A. The directive is based on the principle of procedural fairness and administrative efficiency, not solely on social justice.

Mains practice question

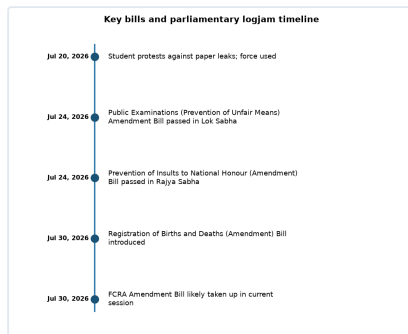
 The Allahabad High Court has held that rejecting a caste certificate application without providing reasons is unconstitutional and violates the principles of natural justice. Critically examine the legal and administrative implications of this judgment in the context of social justice and administrative transparency. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Legal Basis: Cite Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Constitution as the foundational legal basis for the right to reasoned decisions.

2. Judicial Precedents: Reference landmark cases such as *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) on procedural fairness and *State of ...*

Parliamentary Dynamics and Legislative Priorities: Passage of Key Bills Amid Opposition Disruptions



Key bills and parliamentary logjam timeline

GS Paper II — Parliament and State Legislatures — Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these • GS Paper III — Government Budgeting and Policies

Why is this in news?

The Union Government has prioritised the passage of critical legislative measures, including amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and

the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, despite persistent disruptions in Parliament. The legislative agenda reflects the government's intent to enhance regulatory frameworks in domains of national security, demographic data integrity, and examination integrity, even as opposition parties allege excessive use of force against student protesters and obstruct proceedings to stall deliberations.

REMEMBER

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill seeks to further restrict foreign funding for NGOs and enhance government oversight to prevent foreign interference in domestic affairs.

Key Points

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010 regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign

contributions by individuals, associations, and companies, with the objective of preventing foreign interference in India's internal affairs.

- The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill seeks to amend the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 to introduce stricter compliance mechanisms, digitalisation of records, and penalties for delayed registrations, thereby improving demographic data accuracy.
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 was recently passed in the Lok Sabha via voice vote, aiming to deter malpractices in public examinations by enhancing penalties and expanding the scope of offences.
- Parliamentary logjams have become recurrent, with opposition parties frequently disrupting proceedings over issues such as alleged state violence against protesters and perceived lack of accountability in governance.
- The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha amidst din, reflecting the government's legislative momentum despite procedural disruptions.
- The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has prioritised legislative efficiency, often utilising voice votes and guillotine motions to expedite the passage of bills, drawing criticism from opposition parties over procedural fairness.

Key Bills Under Consideration and Their Significance

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill: Proposes to amend the FCRA, 2010 to further restrict foreign funding for NGOs, enhance transparency, and empower the government to suspend or cancel FCRA registrations for non-

compliance. The amendments aim to curb foreign influence in domestic policy matters and strengthen national security frameworks.

- **The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill:** Introduces mandatory digital registration of births and deaths within stipulated timelines, imposes penalties for non-compliance, and integrates the registration system with Aadhaar and other digital identity platforms to ensure data integrity and reduce fraud.
- **The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026:** Expands the scope of offences under the Act to include unauthorised access to question papers, tampering with answer sheets, and collusion with examination officials, with stringent penalties including imprisonment and fines.
- **The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill:** Seeks to amend the 1971 Act to include digital acts of disrespect to the national flag, anthem, or Constitution, thereby addressing modern forms of insults in the digital age.
- **Parliamentary procedures** such as voice votes, guillotine motions, and zero-hour discussions are being utilised to expedite legislative business, though these methods are often criticised for limiting thorough debate and scrutiny.
- **The opposition's demand for an apology from the Union Home Minister** over alleged use of force against student protesters highlights the intersection of legislative priorities with broader socio-political issues, including freedom of expression and state accountability.

Relevance for Prelims

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 · Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 · Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 · Parliamentary logjam · Unstarred Question · Voice Vote · Zero Hour · Leader of Opposition

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026: 1. It seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. 2. The bill proposes to reduce the limit for receiving foreign contributions without prior approval. 3. It aims to prohibit public servants from receiving foreign contributions. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All
4. None

Answer: All — Statements 1 and 3 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the bill does not propose to reduce the limit for receiving foreign contributions without prior approval; it strengthens compliance and scrutiny mechanisms.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Speaker of the Lok Sabha has the power to decide the admissibility of a bill under Article 109 of the Constitution. Reason (R): The Speaker's decision on the admissibility of a bill is subject to judicial review.

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A

2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
3. A is true but R is false
4. A is false but R is true

Answer: A is true but R is false — Assertion (A) is true as the Speaker has the power to decide the admissibility of a bill under Article 109. Reason (R) is true but does not correctly explain (A), as the Speaker's decision is not subject to judicial review.

Mains practice question

✍ The functioning of Parliament in India is increasingly being disrupted by opposition-led logjams, raising concerns about the erosion of legislative efficiency and democratic accountability. Critically examine this assertion with reference to recent parliamentary sessions and the legislative agenda of the government. Also, analyse the role of the Speaker/Chairperson in maintaining decorum and ensuring the smooth conduct of legislative business. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Context and Recent Trends:

- Briefly describe the current parliamentary logjam, citing the recent disruptions in both Houses (e.g., Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and the government's push to pass key bills like the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, and the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill.
- Highlight the ...

Constitutional Limits on the Powers of the National Scheduled Castes Commission: Supreme Court's Ruling on Salary Arrears Orders



Mind map: Constitutional Limits on the Powers of the National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC)

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Non-Constitutional Bodies

The National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC) cannot issue binding orders or direct monetary payments; its powers are strictly advisory and recommendatory under Articles 338, 338A, and 338B of the...

Why is this in news?

The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgment delivered on 29 July 2026, clarified the constitutional limits of the National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC) by staying its order

PRELIMS POINTER

The National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC) was established under Article 338 of the Constitution to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and to...

directing the Mumbai Port Authority to pay salary arrears to a Scheduled Caste employee. The Court held that the NCSC lacks the authority to issue binding orders, including directions for monetary payments, as its powers are advisory and recommendatory under Articles 338, 338A, and 338B of the Constitution.

Key Points

- The National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC) was established under Article 338 of the Constitution to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and to advise the Government on their effective implementation.
- The NCSC's functions are primarily investigative, recommendatory, and advisory, aimed at promoting social justice and equity for marginalised communities.
- The Bombay High Court, in October 2024, upheld the NCSC's order directing the Mumbai Port Authority to rectify roster reservations and pay salary arrears, which was subsequently challenged in the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court's intervention underscores the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers and the need to prevent overreach by quasi-judicial bodies.

What is the National Scheduled Castes Commission (NCSC)?

- The NCSC is a constitutional body established under Article 338 of the Constitution of India to safeguard the rights and interests of Scheduled Castes.
- Its primary functions include monitoring the implementation of constitutional provisions for SCs, investigating complaints

of atrocities or deprivation of rights, and advising the Central and State Governments on policy measures.

- The Commission is empowered to summon witnesses, examine documents, and conduct inquiries but lacks the authority to issue binding orders or adjudicate disputes.
- The NCSC submits annual reports to the President of India, which are laid before Parliament, ensuring transparency and accountability in governance.
- The Commission's role is advisory and recommendatory, not judicial; thus, it cannot substitute the functions of civil courts or tribunals.
- The Supreme Court, in this judgment, reiterated that the NCSC's powers are limited to those expressly conferred by the Constitution and cannot be expanded through judicial interpretation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Constitutional mandate of NCSC (Article 338)	Establishes the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) as a constitutional body to monitor the implementation of safeguards for SCs and investigate complaints regarding their rights.
Advisory and recommendatory powers	NCSC can investigate, recommend, and advise but lacks the authority to issue binding orders or enforce judicial decisions.
Judicial review of NCSC orders	Supreme Court can examine the legality of NCSC orders, ensuring adherence to constitutional provisions and statutory limits.

Feature	Significance
Reservation roster and promotions	The case involved a dispute over reservation roster and promotions, highlighting the intersection of constitutional rights and administrative actions.
Salary arrears and financial implications	The question of whether NCSC can direct payment of salary arrears underscores the limits of its powers and the separation of powers doctrine.

Significance for India

- Reaffirms the separation of powers by clarifying that quasi-judicial bodies like NCSC cannot usurp judicial functions.
- Upholds the constitutional design where only courts can issue binding orders, including those related to financial liabilities.
- Prevents administrative bodies from being subjected to non-binding directives that may lack legal enforceability.
- Highlights the need for clear demarcation of powers between constitutional commissions and judicial bodies.
- Reinforces the role of NCSC in addressing social justice concerns without overstepping its constitutional mandate.

Challenges

- **Overreach of Constitutional Commissions** — Risk of constitutional commissions assuming judicial or executive functions beyond their mandate.
- **Enforcement of Reservation Policies** — Challenges in ensuring compliance with reservation policies in promotions and roster systems.

- **Separation of Powers Doctrine** — Ensuring that no organ of the state usurps the functions of another, as per the basic structure of the Constitution.

Way Forward

- Clarify the powers and limitations of constitutional commissions like NCSC through legislative or judicial interpretation.
- Strengthen the legal framework to ensure that advisory bodies do not overstep their constitutional mandate.
- Enhance coordination between constitutional commissions, courts, and administrative bodies to avoid jurisdictional conflicts.
- Promote awareness among stakeholders about the roles and limitations of constitutional commissions.

Relevance for Prelims

Scheduled Castes Commission · Article 338, 338A, 338B · Constitutional bodies vs statutory bodies · Judicial review of administrative orders

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC): 1. The NCSC is a constitutional body established under Article 338 of the Constitution of India. 2. The NCSC has the power to issue binding orders for the payment of salary arrears to Scheduled Caste employees. 3. The NCSC can only make recommendations and provide advice to the government, and does not have judicial powers. 4. The NCSC was constituted under Article 338B after the

89th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: All four — Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the Supreme Court has clarified that the NCSC cannot issue binding orders for salary arrears.

Q2. Assertion (A): The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) is empowered to enforce its recommendations through binding orders. Reason (R): The NCSC derives its powers from Article 338 of the Constitution, which mandates it to investigate and report on matters relating to the constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Castes. In the context of the above statements, which of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. A is true, but R is false.
4. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is false because the Supreme Court has held that the NCSC cannot issue binding orders. Reason (R) is true as the NCSC's role is advisory and investigatory under Article 338.

Mains practice question

 The Supreme Court has recently clarified that the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) lacks the authority to issue binding orders, including those directing the payment of salary arrears. In this context, critically examine the constitutional mandate of the NCSC and its limitations in enforcing social justice. Also, analyse the implications of this judgment on the balance of powers among the executive, judiciary, and constitutional bodies. (15 Marks)

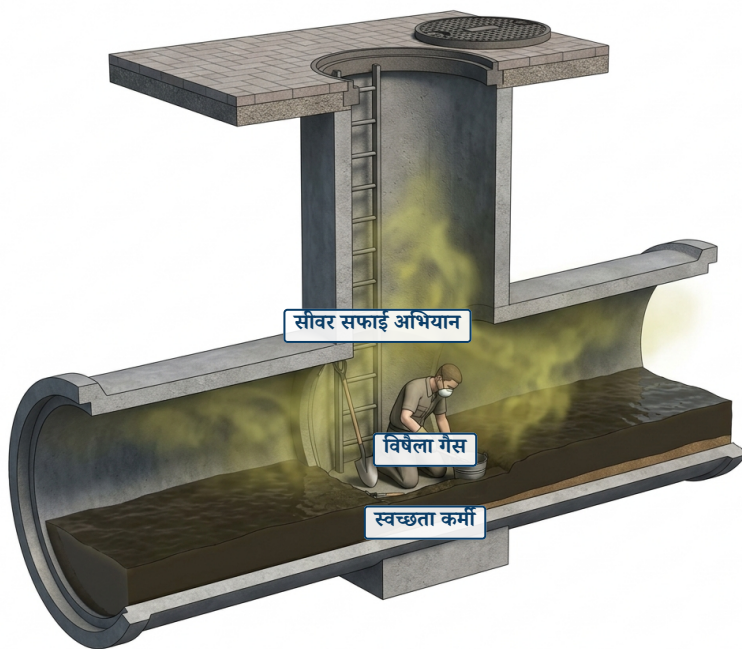
Suggested approach: ['Constitutional mandate of NCSC: Articles 338, 338A, 338B — role as a watchdog and advisory body (1 mark)', 'Judicial vs advisory functions: Distinguish between investigatory, recommendatory powers and judicial/ binding orders (2 marks)', "Supreme Court's reasoning: Reference to the Madhvi Chandorkar case and Mumbai Port Authority judgment (2 marks)", 'Doctrine of separation of powers: How ...

Polity & Governance



Section at a glance: Polity & Governance

NHRC's Suo Motu Action on Sewer Death in Noida: Human Rights, Occupational Safety, and Urban Governance



3D cutaway: राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग ने गौतम बुद्ध नगर जिले, उत्तर प्रदेश में नोएडा अर्थोरिटी द्वारा कि

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations (Human Rights) • GS Paper III — Environment, Urbanisation, and Occupational Safety

Why is this in news?

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken suo motu cognisance of media reports alleging that a 28-year-old sanitation worker died in Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh,

REMEMBER

The NHRC's suo motu action underscores the constitutional and statutory imperative to protect sanitation workers from hazardous working conditions, as mandated by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act...

after inhaling toxic gases during a sewer cleaning operation conducted by the Noida Authority on 14 July 2026. The incident raises serious concerns regarding the violation of fundamental rights to life, dignity, and safe working conditions under Article 21 of the Constitution, as well as India's obligations under international human rights instruments.

Key Points

- Manual scavenging, though constitutionally and statutorily prohibited, persists in India due to inadequate enforcement and systemic neglect, particularly in urban sanitation infrastructure.
- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, mandate stringent safety protocols for workers engaged in hazardous occupations, including sewer cleaning.
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), established under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, is empowered to investigate human rights violations suo motu or on complaints, and recommend remedial measures.
- Uttar Pradesh, with significant urbanisation pressures in districts like Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida), faces recurrent challenges in ensuring safe and dignified working conditions for sanitation workers.
- The incident reflects broader systemic failures in urban governance, where development imperatives often overshadow worker welfare and regulatory compliance.
- India's obligations under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (ICESCR), require the state to ensure safe and healthy working conditions.

What is the legal and institutional framework governing sewer cleaning and worker safety in India?

- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, prohibits the employment of individuals in manual scavenging and mandates the use of mechanised cleaning methods.
- The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, consolidates and strengthens provisions related to hazardous occupations, including sewer cleaning, by requiring employers to provide personal protective equipment (PPE), conduct risk assessments, and ensure emergency response protocols.
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, has the mandate to investigate human rights violations suo motu or on complaints, and recommend measures for redressal, including compensation and policy reforms.
- State governments and urban local bodies are constitutionally responsible for ensuring safe working conditions under the Directive Principles of State Policy and the Fundamental Right to Life (Article 21).
- The Supreme Court, in its landmark judgment in *Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India* (2014), directed the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and the use of mechanised cleaning methods, yet compliance remains inadequate.
- The National Safai Karamchari Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) provides financial assistance for the

rehabilitation of manual scavengers, but systemic barriers persist in accessing these benefits.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Self-initiation by NHRC	Demonstrates NHRC's proactive role in monitoring human rights violations without awaiting formal complaints, ensuring timely intervention.
Death due to toxic gas exposure in sewer cleaning	Highlights the occupational hazard faced by sanitation workers, often working in hazardous conditions without adequate safety measures.
Alleged lack of protective equipment	Indicates systemic failure in compliance with safety protocols, violating fundamental rights to life and dignity under Article 21.
Two-week deadline for detailed report	Reflects NHRC's urgency in addressing the matter and holding authorities accountable for lapses.
Involvement of police and fire brigade in rescue	Underscores the multi-agency response required in such incidents, yet insufficient to prevent fatality.

Significance for India

- The incident underscores the violation of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Constitution, which includes the right to a safe working environment.
- NHRC's suo motu cognisance reinforces the constitutional mandate under Article 32 (Right to Constitutional Remedies) to protect fundamental rights.

- The incident raises questions about the efficacy of municipal governance in urban areas, particularly in ensuring compliance with safety regulations.
- NHRC's notice to NOIDA Authority and police commissioner signals a demand for institutional accountability and transparency.
- The death of a sanitation worker during sewer cleaning reflects the precarious conditions of manual scavenging, despite legal prohibitions under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

Relevance for Prelims

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Manual Scavenging Act 2013, Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020, Noida Authority, Sewer Cleaning Protocols, Hazardous Waste (Management, Handling and Transboundary Movement) Rules 2008

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Which constitutional provision is most directly violated when a worker dies due to inhalation of toxic gases while cleaning sewers without adequate safety equipment?

1. Article 14 (Right to Equality)
2. Article 19 (Freedom of Profession)
3. Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty)
4. Article 32 (Right to Constitutional Remedies)

Answer: Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) — Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which includes the right to a safe and dignified working environment. Death due to negligence in occupational safety directly contravenes this fundamental right.

Q2. Under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which authority is empowered to prohibit hazardous manual cleaning of sewers?

1. State Pollution Control Boards
2. District Magistrates
3. National Human Rights Commission
4. National Safai Karamchari Commission

Answer: National Safai Karamchari Commission — The National Safai Karamchari Commission (NSKF) is mandated under the Act to monitor compliance, investigate violations, and recommend action against manual scavenging, including hazardous sewer cleaning.

Mains practice question

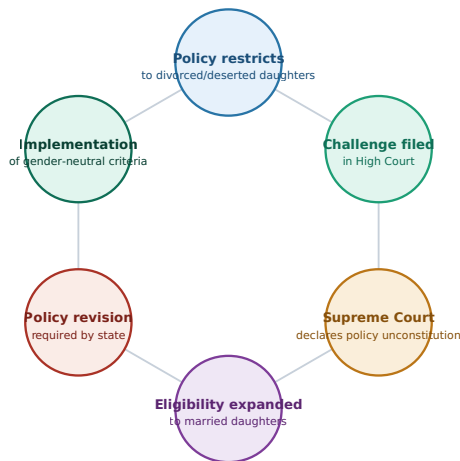
✍ The death of a sanitation worker in Noida due to toxic gas inhalation during sewer cleaning highlights systemic failures in urban governance and worker safety. Critically examine the legal, institutional, and ethical dimensions of this incident, and suggest measures to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Suggested approach: Begin by outlining the constitutional and statutory framework governing worker safety, particularly the Right to Life under Article 21 and the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act, 2013. Analyse the institutional failures, including the role of municipal

authorities, NHRC's suo motu cognisance, and the lack of adherence to Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards. ...

Constitutional Imperative of Gender-Neutral Compassionate Appointment: Supreme Court's Verdict on Married Daughters' Eligibility

compassionate appointment process



compassionate appointment process

GS Paper II — Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 15, 16) • GS Paper II — Judiciary and Constitutional Framework

Compassionate appointments must comply with Articles 14 and 16; marital status cannot justify gender discrimination in public employment.

Why is this in news?

On 31 July 2026, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment in **Saira Khatoon v. State of Bihar**, declaring the Bihar government's policy

restricting compassionate appointments to only divorced or deserted daughters as unconstitutional. The Court held that such a gender-discriminatory classification violates Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution, thereby affirming the eligibility of married daughters for compassionate appointments on par with married sons. The judgment underscores the judiciary's role in ensuring constitutional morality over executive policy discretion.

PRELIMS POINTER

The term 'compassionate appointment' refers to a provision enabling the appointment of a dependent family member of a deceased government employee to a suitable post in government service, primarily to alleviate...

Key Points

- The term 'compassionate appointment' refers to a provision enabling the appointment of a dependent family member of a deceased government employee to a suitable post in government service, primarily to alleviate financial hardship.
- The Bihar government's policy dated 10 December 2014 restricted compassionate appointments to 'divorced or deserted daughters' of deceased employees, excluding married daughters in intact marriages.
- The policy was challenged before the Patna High Court, which upheld the government's stance, prompting an appeal to the Supreme Court.
- The Court rejected the state's argument that married daughters sever ties with their natal family, affirming that

marital status cannot be a basis for exclusion under constitutional guarantees.

What is Compassionate Appointment?

- It is not a vested right but a welfare measure, governed by executive instructions issued by state governments or the central government, subject to judicial review.
- The Supreme Court has consistently held that such appointments must adhere to the principles of Articles 14 and 16, ensuring equality and non-discrimination.
- The eligibility criteria typically include the dependency of the applicant on the deceased employee and the absence of alternative means of livelihood.
- The policy in question (Bihar, 2014) exemplifies gender bias by restricting eligibility to 'divorced or deserted daughters', thereby perpetuating stereotypes about married women's familial obligations.
- The Court's ruling reinforces the constitutional mandate that 'marriage' cannot be a ground for differential treatment in public employment, as it violates the right to equality and equal opportunity.
- The judgment also highlights the importance of judicial review in curbing executive overreach in policy formulation, particularly where such policies infringe upon fundamental rights.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Constitutional Prohibition of Gender Discrimination	Ensures equality before law (Article 14) and prohibits discrimination based on gender, including marital status.
Compassionate Appointment Policy	A welfare measure for dependents of deceased government employees, aimed at providing immediate livelihood support.
Marital Status-Based Classification	Invalidates policies that restrict eligibility solely on grounds of marital status, particularly disadvantaging married daughters.
Judicial Review of Executive Policies	Demonstrates the judiciary's role in striking down unconstitutional executive actions, ensuring adherence to constitutional mandates.
Right to Livelihood	Reinforces the constitutional guarantee of livelihood under Article 21, interpreted to include dignified employment opportunities.

Significance for India

- The judgment reaffirms the principle of gender equality under Article 14, extending protection to married daughters against discriminatory policies.
- It clarifies that marital status cannot be a ground for exclusion in compassionate appointments, aligning with constitutional morality.
- The verdict addresses systemic gender bias in employment policies, particularly against married daughters, who are often perceived as financially dependent post-marriage.

- It promotes inclusivity by recognising the right of married daughters to seek compassionate appointments, irrespective of marital status.
- State governments must review and amend compassionate appointment policies to comply with the judgment, ensuring gender-neutral eligibility criteria.

Challenges

- **Gender Bias in Policy Formulation** — Many state policies continue to operate under patriarchal assumptions, excluding married daughters from welfare schemes.
- **Judicial Overreach vs. Executive Discretion** — Balancing judicial intervention in policy matters with the need for executive autonomy remains a challenge.
- **Implementation and Compliance Gaps** — States may face challenges in revising policies promptly to comply with the judgment, leading to delays in implementation.
- **Societal and Cultural Barriers** — Deep-rooted patriarchal norms may influence societal acceptance of married daughters' rights to compassionate appointments.

Way Forward

- State governments must immediately review and amend compassionate appointment policies to ensure gender-neutral eligibility criteria, in compliance with the judgment.
- Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns to educate stakeholders—including government officials, beneficiaries, and the public—about the constitutional rights of married daughters.

- Establish a monitoring mechanism to track the implementation of revised policies and address compliance gaps promptly.
- Provide capacity-building training for administrative officials to sensitise them to gender equality principles and constitutional obligations.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Compassionate Appointment in India: 1. Compassionate appointment is a provision to provide employment to the dependents of a deceased government employee. 2. The Supreme Court has held that married daughters are ineligible for compassionate appointment solely on the ground of their marital status. 3. Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws. 4. The policy of restricting compassionate appointment to only divorced or deserted daughters is constitutionally valid. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only one — Statements 1 and 3 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the Supreme Court has ruled that married daughters cannot be denied compassionate appointment solely on the ground of their marital status. Statement 4 is incorrect as the Supreme Court has held that such a policy violates Article 14 of the Constitution.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court has held that any policy classifying individuals on the basis of gender for public employment is unconstitutional. Reason (R): Article 16(2) of the

Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex in matters of public employment. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A C. A is true, but R is false D. A is false, but R is true

Answer: ? — Both A and R are true. The Supreme Court has consistently held that gender-based discrimination in public employment violates Article 16(2). However, R is not the correct explanation of A as A refers to compassionate appointment policies, while R is a general constitutional provision.

Mains practice question

 The Supreme Court has recently held that a state policy restricting compassionate appointments to only divorced or deserted daughters is unconstitutional. Critically examine the constitutional and judicial foundations of this judgment with reference to Article 14, Article 16, and judicial precedents. Also, analyse the implications of this judgment for gender justice in public employment. (15 Marks)

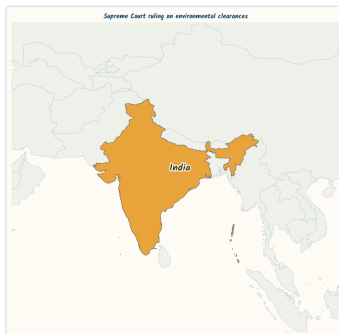
Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Constitutional Foundations:

- Article 14: Right to Equality (equality before law and equal protection of laws).
- Article 16: Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, including prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Judicial Review: The Supreme Court's power to strike down unconstitutional state policies (Art. 13).

2. Judicial ...

Judicial Scrutiny of Ex Post Facto Environmental Clearances: SC Ruling on Administrative Overreach and Amnesty Schemes



Supreme Court ruling on environmental clearances

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Administrative Law • GS Paper III — Environment, Forest and Climate Change • GS Paper III — Government Policies and Interventions

Why is this in news?

The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgment delivered on July 29, 2026, quashed the 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) that had permitted ex post facto environmental clearances for infrastructure projects, holding it to be ultra vires the Environmental Protection Act, 1986, and violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The judgment reaffirms the mandatory nature of prior environmental clearances under the 2006 EIA Notification and

REMEMBER

The Supreme Court has held that ex post facto environmental clearances granted through administrative orders (e.g., the 2021 OM) are unconstitutional, as they violate Articles 14 and 21 and undermine the statutory...

restrains the Centre from issuing administrative orders to bypass statutory environmental safeguards. While striking down the perpetual amnesty regime envisaged in the 2021 OM, the Court upheld the Centre's power to introduce selective amnesty schemes for projects of 'supervening public interest', provided they meet constitutional thresholds of reasonableness and proportionality.

Key Points

- The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, issued under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986, mandates prior environmental clearance for large-scale projects across sectors such as highways, airports, real estate, ports, mining, energy, and heavy industry to ensure environmental sustainability and compliance with the precautionary principle.
- The 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) expanded this amnesty regime into a perpetual administrative mechanism, permitting ex post facto clearances for all permissive projects without adequate differentiation or justification grounded in 'supervening public interest'.
- The OM was challenged before the Supreme Court on grounds of being an impermissible exercise of delegated legislative power, violating constitutional principles of equality (Article 14) and right to life (Article 21), and undermining the statutory framework of environmental governance.

What is Ex Post Facto Environmental Clearance?

- Ex post facto environmental clearance refers to the retrospective grant of environmental clearance to projects that have already commenced or been completed without

obtaining prior statutory clearance under the EIA Notification, 2006.

- Such clearances are granted after the fact, often as part of amnesty schemes, to regularise non-compliant projects and avoid legal or operational disruptions.
- The 2006 EIA Notification mandates prior environmental clearance for specified categories of projects to ensure that environmental impacts are assessed and mitigated before project implementation, in line with the precautionary principle and sustainable development.
- Ex post facto clearances undermine the statutory framework by bypassing pre-project environmental scrutiny, risking irreversible environmental damage and violating the principle of intergenerational equity.
- The Supreme Court, in its judgment, distinguished between ‘one-time amnesty’ schemes and perpetual amnesty regimes (e.g., the 2021 OM), holding the latter to be constitutionally impermissible.
- The Court emphasised that any amnesty scheme must satisfy the twin tests of reasonableness (Article 14) and proportionality (Article 21), and must be grounded in ‘supervening public interest’ to justify retrospective regularisation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Ex post facto environmental clearances	Allows projects to commence without prior environmental clearance and seek retroactive approvals, undermining the precautionary

Feature	Significance
	principle and sustainable development objectives.
2006 Notification on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	Mandates prior environmental clearance for large-scale projects, ensuring compliance with environmental safeguards before project initiation.
2017 'One-time amnesty' notification	Provided retrospective clearance for projects initiated without prior approval, subject to conditions, but was later superseded by the 2021 OM.
2021 Office Memorandum (OM)	Attempted to establish a perpetual regime for granting ex post facto clearances, deemed impermissible as it altered the 2006 notification through an administrative order.
Supervening public interest	A legal threshold for granting retrospective clearances, requiring projects to demonstrate exceptional public benefit to justify environmental violations.

Significance for India

- The judgment reinforces the primacy of delegated legislation (2006 EIA notification) over administrative orders, upholding the doctrine of legislative supremacy in environmental governance.
- It clarifies the legal limits of executive power, affirming that the government cannot bypass statutory environmental safeguards through administrative measures.

- The decision reaffirms the precautionary principle, mandating prior environmental assessments to prevent irreversible ecological damage.
- It restricts the scope for retrospective clearances, ensuring that only projects of exceptional public interest may qualify under narrowly defined conditions.
- The quashing of the 2021 OM may delay or disrupt ongoing projects lacking prior clearances, necessitating compliance with the 2006 notification.

Challenges

- **Administrative Overreach in Environmental Regulation** — The 2021 OM exemplifies the risk of executive bodies diluting statutory environmental safeguards through administrative orders.
- **Balancing Development and Environmental Protection** — The challenge lies in reconciling rapid infrastructure development with stringent environmental standards.
- **Judicial Review of Executive Actions** — The case demonstrates the judiciary's role in checking executive overreach in environmental matters.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding ex post facto environmental clearances in India: 1. The requirement for prior environmental clearance for large-scale projects is mandated under the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification, 2006. 2. The Supreme Court in its judgment of July 29, 2026, upheld the validity of the Office Memorandum 2021 granting ex post facto clearances. 3. The Environmental Protection Act, 1986 empowers

the Central Government to frame rules for environmental protection. 4. The precautionary principle and sustainable development are guiding principles under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: All four — Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the Supreme Court quashed the Office Memorandum 2021 granting ex post facto clearances.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court in its judgment of July 29, 2026, held that the Office Memorandum 2021 was ultra vires the objectives of the Environmental Protection Act, 1986. Reason (R): The Office Memorandum 2021 failed to satisfy the threshold of reasonableness and proportionality and was violative of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

1. A
2. B
3. C
4. D

Answer: B — Both the Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and the Reason (R) correctly explains the Assertion (A). The Supreme Court

held the Office Memorandum 2021 to be ultra vires due to its violation of Articles 14 and 21 and lack of reasonableness.

Mains practice question

✍ Critically examine the Supreme Court's judgment in the case of ex post facto environmental clearances, delivered on July 29, 2026. In your answer, highlight the legal principles violated by the Office Memorandum 2021 and the implications of the judgment for environmental governance in India. Also, discuss the balance between development imperatives and environmental protection in the context of the precautionary principle and sustainable development. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 Marks): Briefly state the context of the judgment, the Office Memorandum 2021, and the Supreme Court's decision to quash it prospectively.

2. Legal Principles Violated (4 Marks):

- Violation of **delegated legislation**: The 2021 OM supplanted the 2006 EIA Notification, which is a delegated legislation under the Environmental Protection Act, ...

Indian Evacuation Operations during the 2026 US-Iran Conflict: Mechanism, Challenges, and Policy Implications for Indian Foreign Policy



Mind map: Indian Evacuation Operations during the 2026 US-Iran Conflict

GS Paper II — International Relations — India and its Neighbourhood, Bilateral Groupings, Regional Organisations • GS Paper II — International Relations — India's Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

India's evacuation operations during the 2026 US-Iran conflict exemplify the synergy between consular diplomacy, digital innovation, and regional cooperation in safeguarding nationals abroad.

Why is this in news?

The return of approximately 1.4 lakh Indian nationals from West Asia during the 2026 US-Iran conflict

underscores the operational

efficacy of India's consular machinery and the strategic importance of evacuation diplomacy. The Lok Sabha revelation by the Ministry of External Affairs highlights the multi-country coordination, logistical arrangements, and digital innovations deployed to ensure the safe repatriation of citizens. This event is significant for UPSC aspirants as it intersects with India's foreign policy priorities, consular diplomacy,

PRELIMS POINTER

The 2026 US-Iran conflict escalated regional tensions in West Asia, particularly affecting the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime chokepoint for global oil trade.

and crisis management mechanisms, offering a contemporary case study for understanding India's role in West Asia.

Key Points

- The 2026 US-Iran conflict escalated regional tensions in West Asia, particularly affecting the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime chokepoint for global oil trade.
- Indian nationals in West Asia, including labourers, students, and professionals, faced heightened security risks due to the conflict, necessitating urgent evacuation measures.
- India maintains a significant diaspora in West Asia, with over 8 million Indian nationals residing across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, making consular preparedness critical.
- The evacuation operation was coordinated under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), leveraging India's diplomatic missions, regional partnerships, and digital tools.
- Historically, India has conducted large-scale evacuations, such as Operation Sukoon (2006, Lebanon) and Operation Raahat (2015, Yemen), setting precedents for crisis response.
- The conflict highlighted the vulnerabilities of Indian nationals in conflict zones and the need for robust contingency planning in India's foreign policy.

What are the key components of India's evacuation diplomacy during geopolitical crises?

- **Multi-Layered Consular Mechanism:** India employs a structured, multi-tiered system involving embassies, consulates, and regional hubs to monitor crises, issue advisories, and coordinate evacuations.

- **Transit Visa Facilitation:** During the 2026 crisis, Saudi transit visas were arranged for Indian nationals in Bahrain, Kuwait, and other countries to facilitate cross-border movement.
- **Non-Scheduled Flights and Cross-Border Movements:** The MEA coordinated non-scheduled flights and cross-border travel arrangements, particularly in Kuwait, Iraq, and Armenia, to expedite repatriation.
- **24×7 Control Rooms:** Dedicated control rooms were established in India and abroad to provide round-the-clock assistance, disseminate updates, and coordinate logistics for stranded nationals.
- **Community Engagement:** Indian missions maintained regular contact with Indian community groups to disseminate critical information and ensure swift response during evacuations.
- **Advisory Framework:** The MEA issued advisories cautioning Indian nationals to remain in contact with missions and provided multilingual helplines (email, WhatsApp, toll-free numbers) for emergency communication.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Multi-country coordination	Demonstrated India's diplomatic reach and crisis-response capability across West Asia, involving missions in Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Armenia, Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and Oman.
Transit visa facilitation	Enabled safe passage for 32,500 nationals (Kuwait, Bahrain) through third-country transit, leveraging bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia.

Feature	Significance
Cross-border movement assistance	Supported 6,233 nationals (Iraq, Armenia) via land routes, highlighting adaptability in conflict zones with restricted airspace.
Digital emergency platform	Final trials of a unified digital system to streamline real-time tracking, communication, and evacuation logistics for future crises.
24x7 control rooms	Ensured uninterrupted support via dedicated helplines, WhatsApp channels, and social media for stranded nationals and families.

Significance for India

- Reinforced India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy by prioritising the safety of Indian nationals in West Asia, a region critical for energy security and diaspora welfare.
- Showcased operational agility in navigating geopolitical tensions (US-Iran conflict) without compromising sovereignty or over-reliance on external powers.
- Minimised disruptions to remittance flows from the Gulf, where 60% of India's overseas remittances originate, preserving household incomes and macroeconomic stability.
- Prevented potential labour market shocks by ensuring the return of skilled and semi-skilled workers, averting skill shortages in key sectors like construction and healthcare.
- Averted a humanitarian crisis by evacuating 1.4 lakh nationals, reducing risks of stranded populations in conflict zones with limited consular support.

Challenges

- **Geopolitical Constraints** — Restricted airspace in conflict zones (e.g., partial closure in Qatar) necessitated alternative routes, increasing logistical complexity and costs.
- **Operational Bottlenecks** — Managing 1.4 lakh returnees required coordination between missions, airlines, and host governments, risking bottlenecks in documentation and transport.
- **Information Asymmetry** — Real-time tracking of nationals in conflict zones was challenged by disrupted communications, necessitating multi-channel outreach (e.g., WhatsApp, social media).
- **Post-Evacuation Integration** — Reintegrating 1.4 lakh returnees into the labour market without wage disruptions or skill mismatches posed economic challenges.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the evacuation of Indian nationals during the West Asia Crisis 2026: 1. The highest number of Indian nationals were assisted through Qatar, facilitated by the partial reopening of its airspace. 2. Kuwait facilitated the return of 30,000 Indian nationals using Saudi transit visas and non-scheduled flights. 3. Jordan accounted for the highest number of Indian nationals facilitated to return among the listed countries. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statements 1 and 2 are correct as per the data provided. Statement 3 is incorrect because Qatar accounted for the highest number (1,00,000), not Jordan.

Q2. Assertion (A): During the West Asia Crisis 2026, the Indian government set up 24x7 Control Rooms both in India and abroad to coordinate evacuation operations. **Reason (R):** The Ministry of External Affairs follows a structured, multi-layered mechanism to monitor emerging situations and issue advisories to Indian nationals. **Options:** A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is NOT the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Both A and R are true, and R correctly explains A as the Control Rooms were part of the structured mechanism to monitor and respond to the crisis.

Mains practice question

 The evacuation of Indian nationals during the West Asia Crisis 2026 underscores the critical role of Indian missions in crisis management and citizen welfare. Critically examine the institutional mechanisms, diplomatic interventions, and technological innovations employed by the Government of India to ensure the safe return of its citizens. Also, discuss the challenges faced and suggest measures to further strengthen consular services in conflict zones. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Institutional Mechanisms:

- Role of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Indian Missions/Posts in crisis management.
- Multi-layered monitoring mechanism and issuance of advisories to

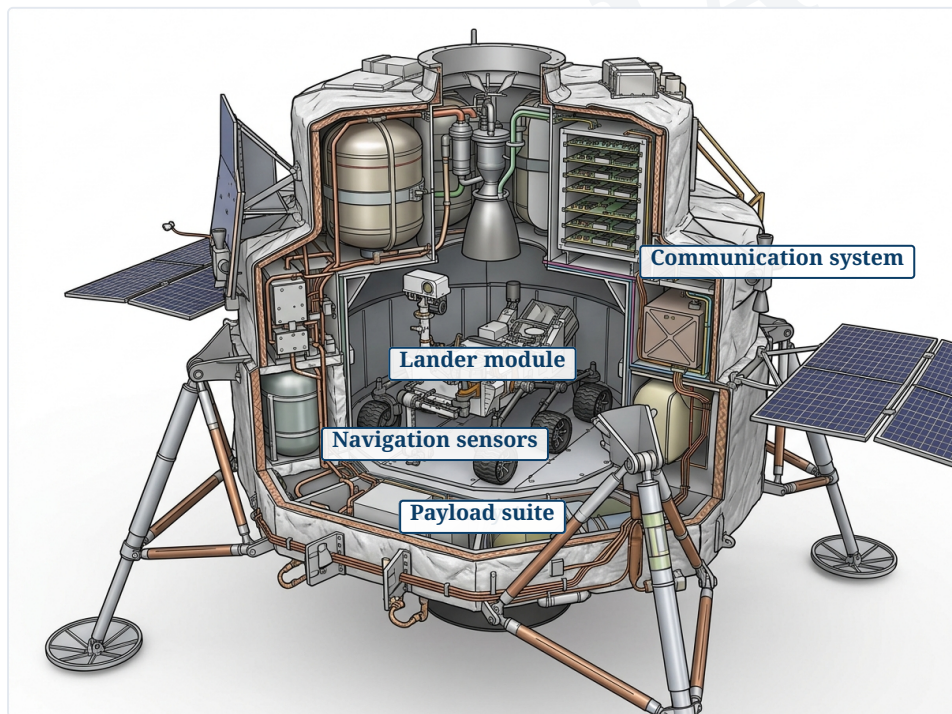
Indian nationals.

- Establishment of 24x7 Control Rooms in India and abroad for real-time coordination.

2. Diplomatic Interventions:

- Facilitation of transit visas (e.g., Saudi transit ...)

Chandrayaan-5: India-Japan Collaboration for Lunar Polar Exploration and Its Strategic Significance in Space Exploration



3D cutaway: ISRO & Japanese scientists review mission Chandrayaan-5 preparation

GS Paper III — Science and Technology — Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life • GS Paper III — Space Technology — Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology • GS Paper III — International Relations — Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India

Why is this in news?

The joint India-Japan mission Chandrayaan-5 (Lunar Polar Exploration Mission, LUPEX), scheduled for launch in 2028 aboard Japan's H3 rocket, has entered a critical phase of technical coordination. A

high-level delegation from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) reviewed progress at ISRO's UR Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru, focusing on inter-spacecraft communication, payload integration, and launch window planning. This mission marks a significant advancement in lunar exploration, targeting the study of lunar water and water-ice in the permanently shadowed regions of the Moon's poles, with contributions from NASA and ESA.

REMEMBER

Chandrayaan-5 (LUPEX) is a joint ISRO-JAXA mission to the lunar poles, launching in 2028 aboard Japan's H3 rocket, with a rover and seven scientific payloads to study lunar water-ice and subsurface composition.

Key Points

- The Chandrayaan-5 mission was approved by the Government of India in March 2025, building on the success of Chandrayaan-3, which achieved a soft landing near the lunar south pole in August 2023.
- India and Japan have a long-standing collaboration in space technology, formalised through agreements such as the MoU signed in 2017 for joint lunar exploration.

- The mission aligns with global efforts under the Artemis Accords and the International Space Exploration Coordination Group (ISECG), where India is an active participant.
- Lunar water-ice is a critical resource for future human missions, as it can be used for life support, fuel production, and scientific research.
- The H3 rocket, developed by JAXA, is a next-generation launch vehicle designed for high reliability and cost-efficiency, making it suitable for deep-space missions.
- ISRO's UR Rao Satellite Centre is the primary hub for satellite and interplanetary mission development, including Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan missions.

What is Chandrayaan-5 (LUPEX)?

- Chandrayaan-5, also known as the Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX), is a joint mission between ISRO and JAXA, with contributions from NASA and ESA.
- The mission aims to explore the permanently shadowed regions of the Moon's poles, where water-ice is suspected to exist in significant quantities.
- ISRO is responsible for developing the lander module, while JAXA is developing the rover, which will traverse the lunar surface to conduct experiments.
- The mission will carry seven scientific instruments, including payloads from NASA (neutron spectrometers) and ESA (mass spectrometer), to study lunar topography, subsurface composition, and water-ice distribution.
- The rover is designed to operate for 100 days (approximately 3–5 lunar days), conducting in-situ analyses and transmitting data to Earth.
- The mission will be launched aboard Japan's H3 rocket.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Joint Mission Framework	Establishes a collaborative model between ISRO and JAXA, leveraging complementary technological strengths for lunar exploration.
Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX)	Focuses on the Moon's polar regions, where water-ice deposits are suspected, critical for future human habitation and in-situ resource utilisation.
Rover-Lander Configuration	ISRO's lander module provides stable touchdown, while JAXA's rover enables mobile surface surveys, enhancing data collection efficiency.
International Payload Integration	NASA and ESA contribute advanced instruments (neutron spectrometers, mass spectrometers), expanding scientific scope and fostering global cooperation.
H3 Launch Vehicle	Utilises Japan's H3 rocket, demonstrating interdependence in space logistics and reducing ISRO's dependency on domestic launch systems.
100-Day Operational Lifespan	Ensures sustained data acquisition for long-term analysis of lunar surface and subsurface conditions.

Significance for India

- Demonstrates India's expanding role in global lunar exploration through bilateral partnerships, enhancing geopolitical influence in space diplomacy.

- Strengthens technological synergy with JAXA, a leading space agency with expertise in robotic exploration and sample return missions.
- Targets direct evidence of water-ice in lunar polar regions, pivotal for validating theories on the Moon's volatile distribution.
- Enables high-resolution mapping of topography and mineral composition, supporting future lunar base site selection.
- Develops a dual-spacecraft system (lander-rover) with autonomous navigation and communication, a first for India's lunar missions.

Challenges

- **Technical Coordination in Joint Missions** — Ensuring seamless interoperability between ISRO's lander and JAXA's rover, including communication, power, and thermal management systems.
- **Launch Vehicle Dependence** — Mitigating risks associated with Japan's H3 rocket, which is still in development and has faced delays in its maiden flight.
- **Long-Duration Operational Sustainability** — Maintaining power supply and thermal stability for the lander and rover over 100 days, especially during lunar night periods.
- **Data Security and International Collaboration** — Safeguarding sensitive data shared with international partners, particularly NASA and ESA, against cyber threats or unauthorised access.

Relevance for Prelims

Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX) · H3 launch vehicle · ISRO-JAXA collaboration · Chandrayaan-3 · Gaganyaan-1 · Neutron spectrometer · Mass spectrometer · Lunar water-ice studies

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Chandrayaan-5 mission: 1. It is a joint mission between ISRO and JAXA. 2. The mission will be launched using India's GSLV-Mk III rocket. 3. The mission aims to study water and water-ice on the lunar surface and subsurface. 4. NASA and ESA are also participating in the mission by providing payloads. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the mission will be launched using Japan's H3 rocket, not India's GSLV-Mk III.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Chandrayaan-5 mission, also known as LUPEX, is designed to study the lunar polar region. Reason (R): The lunar polar regions are believed to contain significant deposits of water-ice, which are critical for future human exploration and potential resource utilisation. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A

2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
3. A is true, but R is false
4. A is false, but R is true

Answer: Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A — Both the assertion and reason are true. The lunar polar regions are targeted for water-ice exploration, and the mission's scientific objectives are aligned with this goal.

Mains practice question

✍ Critically analyse the significance of international collaborations in India's lunar exploration programme, with particular reference to the Chandrayaan-5 mission. How do such partnerships enhance India's strategic and scientific objectives in space? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction: Define Chandrayaan-5 (LUPEX) as a joint ISRO-JAXA mission with international participation (NASA, ESA), launching on Japan's H3 rocket in 2028.

2. Scientific Significance:

- Targeting lunar polar regions for water-ice detection (critical for future human missions and in-situ resource utilisation).
- Seven scientific instruments (e.g., neutron spectrometers by NASA, mass spectrometer ...

Cauvery Water Dispute: Historical Missions and Contemporary Diplomacy in Inter-State Water Governance

Cauvery dispute: 1980s vs 2026

	1980s missions	2026 visit
purpose	Secure water releases	Secure water releases
approach	Political diplomacy	Political diplomacy
context	No tribunal award	Post-tribunal award
stakeholders	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puduche
outcome	Temporary relief	Pending implementation

Cauvery dispute: 1980s vs 2026

GS Paper II — Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure • GS Paper III — Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT), constituted under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, delivered its final award in 2007, allocating specific water shares to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu...

Why is this in news?

The proposed visit of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay to Bengaluru on August 3, 2026, to engage in inter-State negotiations on the Cauvery water-sharing dispute has reignited public discourse on the historical precedents of such diplomatic missions.

PRELIMS POINTER

The Cauvery river dispute is an enduring inter-State water-sharing conflict between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, with Kerala and Puducherry as other stakeholders, arising from competing demands for irrigation, drinking...

This visit, aimed at securing water releases for Tamil Nadu's agricultural requirements, evokes memories of similar envoy missions undertaken by Tamil Nadu's leadership in the mid-1980s under Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran.

Key Points

- The Cauvery river dispute is an enduring inter-State water-sharing conflict between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, with Kerala and Puducherry as other stakeholders, arising from competing demands for irrigation, drinking water, and ecological needs.
- The dispute has its origins in the colonial era but gained prominence post-independence due to increased agricultural intensification and competing developmental priorities in the riparian States.
- The Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, provides the legal framework for resolving such disputes, empowering the Union Government to constitute tribunals for adjudication.
- The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT), constituted in 1990, delivered its final award in 2007, allocating specific water shares to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry. However, implementation challenges persist due to opposition from Karnataka and subsequent petitions in the Supreme Court.
- Historical episodes, such as the mid-1980s missions by Tamil Nadu's leadership to Bengaluru, highlight the role of political diplomacy in mitigating water scarcity crises, even in the absence of binding tribunal awards.
- The proposed visit by Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister follows recurring demands for water releases during critical

agricultural seasons, particularly the samba cultivation period in Tamil Nadu.

What is the Cauvery Water Dispute?

- The Cauvery dispute is a protracted inter-State water-sharing conflict primarily between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, with Kerala and Puducherry as additional stakeholders, over the equitable distribution of the river's waters.
- The dispute stems from the river's flow being seasonal and unevenly distributed across the riparian States, leading to competing claims for irrigation, drinking water, and ecological sustainability.
- The Cauvery basin covers approximately 81,155 square kilometres, with Karnataka contributing the majority of the river's catchment area, while Tamil Nadu relies heavily on its waters for agriculture, particularly in the delta regions.
- The dispute has historical roots, with agreements in 1892 and 1924 under British colonial rule providing initial frameworks for water sharing, though these were insufficient to address post-independence developmental pressures.
- The Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, empowers the Union Government to constitute tribunals to adjudicate such disputes, leading to the establishment of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) in 1990.
- The CWDT's final award in 2007 allocated 419 tmc ft of water annually to Tamil Nadu, 270 tmc ft to Karnataka, 30 tmc ft to Kerala, and 7 tmc ft to Puducherry, with specific monthly allocations to address seasonal variations.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Historical Precedent of Inter-State Water Negotiations (1980s)	Demonstrates Tamil Nadu's long-standing practice of diplomatic missions to Karnataka for Cauvery water releases, highlighting the persistence of inter-state water disputes and the role of political outreach in crisis mitigation.
Role of State-Level Diplomacy in Federal Water Governance	Shows how state governments, despite the existence of judicial and statutory mechanisms, resort to direct negotiations to address acute water scarcity, underscoring the limitations of formal institutions in crisis scenarios.
Quantum of Water Release (1986 Example)	Karnataka's conditional release of 2.5 tmc ft (out of Tamil Nadu's demand of 10 tmc ft) illustrates the asymmetrical power dynamics in inter-state water sharing and the constraints posed by drought conditions in the upper riparian state.
Central Government's Passive Role in Facilitation	The absence of decisive intervention by the Centre in 1986, despite Tamil Nadu's plea, reflects the historical ambiguity in the Union's role in inter-state water disputes, often deferring to judicial resolution.
Political Symbolism in Water Diplomacy	The symbolic gesture of Karnataka's ₹15 lakh drought relief fund to Tamil Nadu, facilitated by MGR, underscores how water sharing is intertwined with political goodwill and electoral considerations.

Relevance for Prelims

Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 · Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) · Inter-State Council · River Boards Act, 1956 · National Water Policy, 2012 · Karnataka-Tamil Nadu relations · Mekedatu project · samba cultivation season

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT): 1. The CWDT was constituted under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956. 2. The CWDT's award is binding on the parties and cannot be appealed in any court. 3. The Cauvery Management Board (CMB) was established to implement the CWDT's final award. 4. The CWDT's jurisdiction includes the assessment of compensation for non-compliance with its orders. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 3 are correct. The CWDT was indeed constituted under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, and the Cauvery Management Board (CMB) was established to implement its award. Statements 2 and 4 are incorrect: the CWDT's award is not binding without the Supreme Court's approval, and it does not assess compensation for non-compliance.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) was established to resolve the long-standing dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over the sharing of Cauvery waters. Reason (R): The Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, empowers the

Union Government to constitute such tribunals for adjudicating inter-State water disputes. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

1. A
2. B
3. C
4. D

Answer: B — Both the assertion and reason are true. The CWDT was indeed established to resolve the Cauvery water dispute, and the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, empowers the Union Government to constitute such tribunals for adjudicating inter-State water disputes. The reason correctly explains the assertion.

Mains practice question

 The Cauvery water dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka exemplifies the challenges of federal water governance in India. Critically examine the efficacy of existing institutional mechanisms—such as the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) and the Cauvery Management Board (CMB)—in resolving inter-State water disputes. Also, analyse the role of the Union Government in mediating such disputes, with reference to recent judicial interventions and historical precedents. (15 Marks)

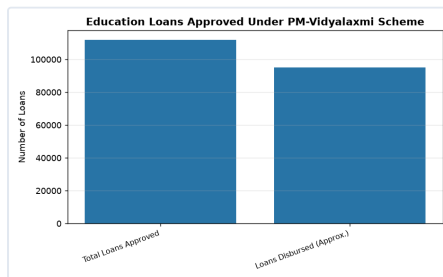
Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks): Briefly define the Cauvery water dispute and its historical context, highlighting the recurring nature of the conflict and its impact on federal relations.

2. Institutional Mechanisms (5 marks):

• **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT):** Constitution under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956; its mandate, composition, and process; limitations ...

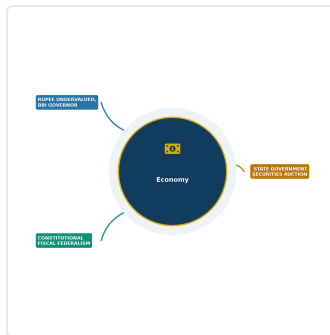
PM-Vidyalaxmi Scheme: 1.12 Lakh Education Loans Approved Since Launch



Education Loans Approved Under PM-Vidyalaxmi Scheme

PM-Vidyalaxmi Scheme: 1.12 Lakh Education Loans Approved Since Launch

Economy



Section at a glance: Economy

Rupee is undervalued, says RBI Governor: What it means and why it matters



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#) — Ministry of Finance of India (GODL-India)

Rupee is undervalued, says RBI Governor: What it means and why it matters

Constitutional Fiscal Federalism in Question: The 16th Finance Commission's Categorisation

of Census Towns and Its Implications for Kerala's Rural Development



Mind map: Constitutional Fiscal Federalism in Question: The 16th F

GS Paper II — Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure • GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment, Government Budgeting

Why is this in news?

The statement by Kerala's Chief Minister alleging that the 16th Finance Commission incorrectly classified census towns as urban areas—thereby reducing rural development funds to ₹300

crore—highlights a critical issue in India's fiscal federalism. This misclassification not only affects Kerala's planned expenditure but also raises questions about the methodology used by the Finance Commission in determining urban and rural allocations, which has direct implications for the devolution of central funds to local bodies across states.

REMEMBER

The 16th Finance Commission's classification of census towns as urban areas has reduced Kerala's rural development funds to ₹300 crore, highlighting the need for accurate demographic and administrative categorisation in...

Key Points

- The Finance Commission is a constitutional body established under Article 280 of the Constitution, tasked with recommending the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the Union and the States and among the States themselves.
- Census towns are settlements that satisfy the demographic and economic criteria for urbanisation (e.g., population density, non-agricultural workforce) but lack formal urban governance structures such as municipalities or municipal corporations.
- Kerala, with its high urbanisation rate and significant presence of census towns, relies heavily on central funds for rural development, particularly for panchayats.
- The classification of areas as urban or rural by the Finance Commission directly impacts the quantum of funds devolved to local bodies, as urban areas typically receive different allocations compared to rural areas.
- Kerala's assertion challenges the Commission's methodology, which may have broader ramifications for other states with similar demographic profiles.

What is a Census Town?

- A census town is defined by the Census of India as a settlement with a population of at least 5,000, a density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre, and at least 75% of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.
- Unlike statutory towns (which have municipal governance), census towns lack formal urban local bodies and are often administratively part of panchayats.

- Census towns are identified during the decennial Census operations and are not subject to administrative reclassification until the next Census.
- The distinction between census towns and statutory towns is crucial for policy planning, as it determines eligibility for urban development schemes and funding.
- Kerala, with its high literacy and economic diversification, has a significant number of census towns, which are often socio-economically advanced but lack municipal infrastructure.
- The Finance Commission's classification of these towns as urban or rural can significantly alter the fiscal landscape for states, as urban areas typically receive higher allocations for infrastructure and services.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Census Towns	Places designated as urban for census purposes but governed as rural panchayats, leading to misallocation of funds due to ambiguous administrative status.
16th Finance Commission	Constitutional body tasked with recommending devolution of funds to states and local bodies; its methodology in classifying census towns impacts fiscal federalism.
Devolution of Funds	The transfer of financial resources from the Union to states and local governments, governed by the Finance Commission's criteria and the Constitution's fiscal principles.
Local Body Funds	Grants-in-aid and plan funds allocated to panchayats, municipalities, and corporations for development, directly affected by incorrect urban-rural classification.

Feature	Significance
Plan Expenditure	Development outlays approved by state governments for infrastructure, welfare, and social sector schemes, constrained by central fund shortfalls.

Significance for India

- The Finance Commission's assessment of census towns as urban areas reduces Kerala's entitlement to central funds for rural development, distorting the principle of equitable resource distribution under Article 280 of the Constitution.
- Incorrect classification undermines the constitutional mandate to strengthen local self-government institutions (Part IX and IX-A) by misallocating funds earmarked for rural governance.
- Census towns, though urban in demographic density, lack municipal governance, creating a fiscal void where rural development funds are diverted or withheld due to misclassification.
- Local bodies in Kerala face funding shortages for planned expenditure, particularly for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and fishing communities, exacerbating socio-economic disparities.
- The Finance Commission's recommendations must align with the constitutional framework of cooperative federalism (Article 280), ensuring that resource allocation reflects ground realities rather than statistical anomalies.

Relevance for Prelims

16th Finance Commission · Census Town · Article 280 of the Constitution · Local Bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities) · Devolution of Funds · Plan vs Non-Plan Expenditure

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Finance Commission of India: 1. The Finance Commission is a constitutional body constituted every five years under Article 280 of the Constitution. 2. The Finance Commission recommends the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the Union and the States. 3. The Finance Commission has the power to define 'urban areas' for the purpose of fund devolution. 4. The 16th Finance Commission was constituted in 2023. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Finance Commission does not define 'urban areas'; this is determined by the Census of India based on specific criteria.

Q2. Assertion (A): Census towns are officially governed as municipalities or municipal corporations. Reason (R): Census towns are classified as urban areas for census purposes but lack municipal governance. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A

2. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
3. A is true but R is false
4. A is false but R is true

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is false because census towns are not officially governed as municipalities or municipal corporations. Reason (R) is true as census towns are classified as urban for census purposes but lack municipal governance.

Mains practice question

✍ Critically examine the constitutional and administrative challenges arising from the classification of census towns as urban areas in the context of intergovernmental fiscal transfers. How does this classification impact the devolution of funds to local bodies, particularly in states like Kerala? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Constitutional Basis:

- Article 280 of the Constitution mandates the Finance Commission to recommend the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the Union and the States.
- The Commission's recommendations are advisory but carry significant weight in fiscal federalism.
- The classification of 'urban' and 'rural' areas is not defined by ...

State Government Securities Auction: Mechanism, Significance, and Implications for Fiscal Federalism and Debt Markets

SGS Auction Process

SGS Auction Process

GS Paper III — Indian Economy: Issues relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment • GS Paper III — Government Budgeting and Fiscal Policy • GS Paper II — Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

✍ State Government Securities (SGS) are market borrowings by state governments, issued via RBI auctions, with tenors ranging from 4 to 25 years and coupon rates determined by competitive bidding...

Why is this in news?

On 31 July 2026, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the auction of State Government Securities

PRELIMS POINTER

State governments in India rely on market borrowings to finance developmental expenditures, as their revenue receipts often fall short of expenditure commitments,

(SGS) for an aggregate face value of ₹26,850 crore, scheduled to be conducted on

particularly in sectors like infrastructure, health, and...

4 August 2026 via the E-Kuber platform. This auction is significant as it reflects the borrowing requirements of multiple state governments, highlights the structure of India's sub-national debt market, and underscores the operational mechanisms of state-level fiscal management within the broader framework of fiscal federalism.

Key Points

- State governments in India rely on market borrowings to finance developmental expenditures, as their revenue receipts often fall short of expenditure commitments, particularly in sectors like infrastructure, health, and education.
- State Development Loans (SDLs), also known as State Government Securities (SGS), are debt instruments issued by state governments to raise funds from the market, distinct from central government securities (G-Secs).
- The issuance of SGS is governed by the provisions of Article 293 of the Constitution of India, which allows states to borrow within limits prescribed by Parliament, subject to the consent of the central government in certain cases.
- The RBI, acting as the debt manager for state governments, conducts auctions for SGS on behalf of state governments, ensuring transparency and efficiency in the borrowing process.
- The auction mechanism for SGS includes both competitive and non-competitive bidding, with a provision for retail investors to participate through the RBI Retail Direct portal, introduced in November 2021.

- The yield on SGS is influenced by factors such as the state's fiscal health, credit ratings, macroeconomic conditions, and the demand-supply dynamics in the debt market.

What are State Government Securities (SGS)?

- State Government Securities (SGS) are debt instruments issued by state governments to raise funds from the financial markets for developmental and non-developmental expenditures.
- SGS are issued in the form of bonds with fixed coupon rates and maturities ranging from short-term to long-term, as seen in the current auction where tenors vary from 4 to 25 years.
- The coupon rate on SGS is determined by the state's creditworthiness, market conditions, and the auction's competitive bidding process.
- SGS are tradable in the secondary market, providing liquidity to investors and enabling price discovery based on yield expectations.
- The RBI conducts auctions for SGS on behalf of state governments, typically through the E-Kuber system, which is a secure and transparent electronic platform for government securities transactions.
- Investors in SGS include banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, provident funds, corporates, and retail investors (via the RBI Retail Direct portal).

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Aggregate Amount (₹26,850 Crore)	

Feature	Significance
	Demonstrates the fiscal borrowing requirements of state governments, reflecting their developmental expenditure and revenue gaps.
Tenor Range (10-25 Years)	Indicates long-term financing needs for state governments, particularly for infrastructure and social sector projects.
Competitive and Non-competitive Bidding	Facilitates market-based pricing while ensuring retail investor participation through the RBI Retail Direct portal.
Re-issue of Existing Securities	Enables state governments to raise additional capital without creating new instruments, leveraging existing market liquidity.
Auction via E-Kuber System	Ensures transparency, efficiency, and real-time processing of bids, aligning with RBI's digital governance framework.

Significance for India

- State government securities (SGS) auctions are a key instrument for financing fiscal deficits, especially in the context of the 15th Finance Commission's recommendations on fiscal consolidation.
- The aggregate borrowing of ₹26,850 Crore underscores the continued reliance on market-based financing for state development expenditures, including infrastructure and social welfare schemes.
- The inclusion of both competitive and non-competitive bidding widens investor participation, including retail

investors, thereby deepening the government securities market.

- The re-issue of existing securities allows states to tap into existing investor demand, reducing the risk of market fragmentation and ensuring smoother rollovers.
- The auction reflects the operationalization of fiscal federalism, where states leverage their borrowing powers under Article 293 of the Constitution to meet developmental needs.

Relevance for Prelims

State Development Loans (SDLs) · Fiscal Deficit · Public Debt · Revenue Deficit · Debt-to-GSDP Ratio · Non-Competitive Bidding Facility · E-Kuber System · Retail Direct Scheme

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the auction of State Government Securities (SGS) in India: 1. The auction of State Government Securities is conducted exclusively through physical bidding at RBI offices. 2. The Reserve Bank of India Core Banking Solution (E-Kuber) system is used for submitting competitive bids. 3. Non-competitive bids can be placed by individual investors through the Retail Direct portal. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is incorrect; the auction is conducted electronically via the E-Kuber system. Statements 2 and 3 are correct as per the RBI press release.

Q2. Assertion (A): The auction of State Government Securities allows up to 10% of the notified amount to be allotted under the non-competitive bidding facility. Reason (R): The non-competitive bidding facility is designed to encourage retail participation in government securities. In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

1. (A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
2. (B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
3. (C) A is true, but R is false.
4. (D) A is false, but R is true.

Answer: (A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. — Both Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and the Reason correctly explains the Assertion as per the RBI's 'Scheme for Non-competitive Bidding Facility'.

Mains practice question

 The auction of State Government Securities (SGS) serves as a critical instrument for fiscal federalism in India. Critically examine the role of State Development Loans (SDLs) in the context of fiscal federalism, with reference to the auction mechanism outlined by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Also, analyse the implications of the non-competitive bidding facility for retail investors. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

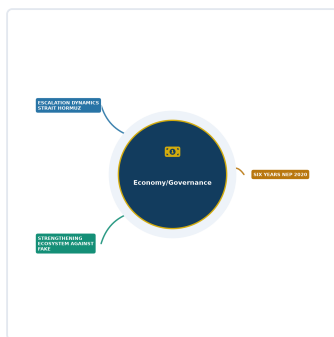
1. Definition and Purpose of SDLs:

- SDLs are securities issued by state governments to finance their fiscal deficits.
- They are governed by the RBI under the State Development Loans Scheme, 2015.

2. Fiscal Federalism and SDLs:

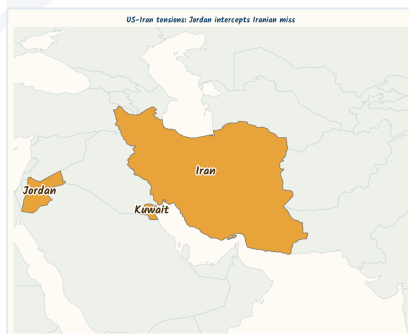
- **Autonomy vs. Accountability:** SDLs enable states to borrow independently while adhering to fiscal discipline ...

Economy/Governance



Section at a glance: Economy/Governance

Escalation Dynamics in the Strait of Hormuz: Implications for Global Energy Security and Regional Stability



US-Iran tensions: Jordan intercepts Iranian missiles

GS Paper II — International Relations — India's interests in West Asia, Maritime Security, and Regional Conflicts • GS Paper III — Economy — Energy Security, Global Supply Chains, and Impact of Geopolitical Risks on Commodity Markets

Why is this in news?

The recent exchange of missile strikes between the United States and Iran, culminating in Jordan's interception of Iranian

missiles and the U.S. conducting fresh strikes in Tehran, underscores the persistent volatility in the Strait of Hormuz—a critical global maritime chokepoint. This escalation, coupled with U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's shadow fleet and accusations of IRGC threats to commercial vessels, highlights the interplay between maritime security, energy geopolitics, and regional power dynamics, with direct implications for India's energy imports and trade routes.

REMEMBER

The Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime chokepoint, accounts for 20-30% of global seaborne oil trade, making it a flashpoint in U.S.-Iran tensions, where asymmetric warfare by the IRGC and U.S.

Key Points

- The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, is a vital artery for global oil trade, with approximately 20-30% of the world's seaborne crude oil passing through it daily.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iran's elite military force, has historically asserted control over the Strait of Hormuz, often disrupting maritime traffic as a geopolitical tool, particularly during periods of heightened U.S.-Iran tensions.
- The IRGC's alleged threats to commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz reflect a broader pattern of asymmetric warfare, including missile attacks and maritime interdiction, designed to project influence and deter adversaries.

- The recent U.S.-Iran military exchanges follow a pattern of tit-for-tat escalations, with both sides leveraging kinetic and economic measures to assert dominance in the region.
- India, a major importer of Middle Eastern oil, relies heavily on the Strait of Hormuz for its energy security, making regional stability in this chokepoint a critical concern for New Delhi.

What is the Strait of Hormuz and why is it strategically significant?

- The Strait of Hormuz is a 39-kilometre-wide waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, serving as the sole maritime route for oil exports from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE.
- Approximately 20-30% of the world's seaborne crude oil and 30% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) transit through the Strait, making it the most critical maritime chokepoint globally.
- The Strait's strategic importance is amplified by the absence of viable alternative routes for large-scale oil shipments, with the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden) and the Strait of Malacca (linking the Indian Ocean to the Pacific) serving as secondary, but less efficient, alternatives.
- The IRGC's control over the Strait is exercised through a combination of naval assets, missile systems, and asymmetric tactics, including the deployment of fast-attack boats and anti-ship missiles.
- The Strait's vulnerability to disruption—whether through military action, sabotage, or sanctions circumvention—poses a systemic risk to global energy markets, as evidenced by past incidents such as the 2019 attacks on Saudi oil facilities and the 2021 Suez Canal blockage.

- The U.S. Fifth Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain, maintains a persistent naval presence in the region to ensure freedom of navigation and deter Iranian aggression, aligning with the principle of ‘Freedom of Navigation Operations’ (FONOPs).

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Jordan's interception of Iranian missiles	Demonstrates regional security dynamics where smaller states are forced to act as frontline defenders against regional aggression, highlighting the limitations of collective security frameworks in West Asia.
US military strikes on Iran	Reinforces the doctrine of preemptive counter-strikes in response to asymmetric threats, a key feature of US counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation strategy in the Middle East.
Patriot missile procurement deal (\$58.6 billion)	Exposes the strain on US defence stockpiles due to sustained conflicts, underscoring the economic and logistical challenges of maintaining global military readiness.
US sanctions on IRGC-linked entities	Targets Iran's shadow fleet and illicit oil trade, reflecting the economic warfare dimension of US-Iran tensions and the use of sanctions as a non-kinetic tool.
CENTCOM's accusation of IRGC threats in the Strait of Hormuz	Highlights the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints in global trade and the role of non-state actors in disrupting international shipping lanes.

Way Forward

- Convene an emergency UN Security Council session to de-escalate tensions and establish a ceasefire mechanism, leveraging the UN's role in conflict resolution.
- Strengthen regional security dialogues, including the Arab League and GCC, to develop a collective response to asymmetric threats in West Asia.
- Enhance maritime security cooperation in the Strait of Hormuz through multilateral agreements, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
- Review and diversify defence procurement strategies to reduce reliance on single suppliers and mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Strait of Hormuz: 1. It is the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. 2. The Strait of Hormuz is bordered by Iran to the north and the United Arab Emirates and Oman to the south. 3. Approximately 20% of the world's petroleum passes through the Strait of Hormuz. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. All
4. None

Answer: All — Statement 1 is correct as the Strait of Hormuz is the sole maritime route from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. Statement 2 is correct as Iran lies to the north while UAE and Oman border the strait to the south. Statement 3 is incorrect; about 20% of global

petroleum trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz, not 20% of the world's petroleum.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States. Reason (R): The IRGC has been accused of supporting proxy groups in West Asia and threatening maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz.

1. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
2. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
3. A is true but R is false
4. A is false but R is true

Answer: Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A — The IRGC is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) by the US State Department. The Reason (R) correctly explains the assertion by citing the IRGC's regional activities, including maritime threats in the Strait of Hormuz.

Mains practice question

✍ The recent escalation in US-Iran tensions has underscored the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz and the role of non-state actors in regional conflicts. Critically analyse the implications of these developments for global maritime security and the efficacy of sanctions as a tool of coercive diplomacy. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Strategic Significance of the Strait of Hormuz:

- Chokepoint for 20% of global oil trade; geopolitical flashpoint.
- Iran's use of asymmetric tactics (e.g., IRGC threats to merchant vessels) to disrupt maritime traffic.
- Reference to US CENTCOM's statement on maintaining access to the

strait.

2. Role of Non-State Actors:

- IRGC's ...

Strengthening the Ecosystem Against Fake Indian Currency Notes: RBI's Enhanced Regulatory Framework and Compliance Imperatives



Mind map: Strengthening the Ecosystem Against Fake Indian Currency

GS Paper III — Money and Banking, Financial Security, Cyber Security

The RBI's Master Direction mandates banks to impound all detected Fake Indian Currency Notes, report them to the RBI, and equip border-area branches with Note Authentication Machines, with compliance...

Why is this in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a directive

PRELIMS POINTER

The circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) poses a significant threat to India's economic

on July 31, 2026, mandating banks to enhance their detection, reporting, and monitoring mechanisms for Fake Indian Currency Notes

stability, monetary policy, and national security by undermining public trust in currency and facilitating illicit...

(FICNs). This follows an analysis indicating inadequate efforts by some banks, necessitating stricter compliance, targeted training, and technological upgrades to fortify the financial ecosystem against counterfeit currency threats.

Key Points

- The circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) poses a significant threat to India's economic stability, monetary policy, and national security by undermining public trust in currency and facilitating illicit financial flows.
- The RBI, as the central monetary authority, regulates the detection and management of counterfeit currency through the Master Direction on Counterfeit Notes – Detection, Reporting and Monitoring, effective April 1, 2026.
- Banks are legally obligated to impound counterfeit notes and report them to the RBI, failing which penalties may be imposed, including detection of FICNs in remittances, currency chest balances, ATM dispensations, or over-the-counter payments.
- Border regions are particularly vulnerable to FICN circulation due to cross-border smuggling and transnational criminal networks, necessitating prioritized training and technological interventions.
- The RBI's directive underscores the need for a systematic, data-driven approach to identify hotspots, monitor trends, and enhance capacity-building efforts among cash-handling staff.

What are Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) and the Regulatory Framework for Their Detection?

- FICNs refer to counterfeit currency notes that mimic genuine Indian banknotes in appearance but lack the security features of authentic currency, such as watermarks, security threads, microtext, and intaglio printing.
- The RBI's Master Direction (April 1, 2026) prescribes a comprehensive framework for banks to detect, report, and monitor FICNs, ensuring uniformity and accountability in compliance.
- Banks must examine all received banknotes using authentication machines and impound counterfeit notes without exception, ensuring they are not returned to the tenderer or destroyed in-house.
- Detected FICNs must be reported to the RBI as per prescribed guidelines, with non-compliance attracting penalties, including financial disincentives and reputational risks.
- The directive emphasizes targeted training for cash-handling staff, with a focus on border-area branches, to enhance detection capabilities and awareness of security features of genuine banknotes.
- Note Authentication/Sorting Machines are mandated for branches in districts with international borders to facilitate real-time detection of counterfeit notes and reduce manual errors.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Security Features of Genuine Banknotes	Distinctive elements such as watermarks, security threads, microtext, and latent images enable differentiation from counterfeit notes, ensuring authenticity verification.
Note Authentication/Sorting Machines	Automated devices equipped with UV, IR, and magnetic sensors to detect counterfeit notes with high precision, reducing human error in detection.
Forged Note Vigilance Cells (FNV Cells)	Dedicated units within banks to monitor, analyse, and report counterfeit currency trends, facilitating targeted interventions and compliance tracking.
Action Taken Report (ATR) Mechanism	Mandatory reporting framework to ensure banks submit compliance reports on training and detection measures, enabling RBI oversight and accountability.
Border Area Prioritisation	Special emphasis on training and equipping branches in international border districts to counter cross-border circulation of counterfeit currency effectively.

Significance for India

- Prevents erosion of public trust in currency, safeguarding the integrity of the monetary system and ensuring seamless transactions.
- Reduces financial losses to banks and individuals by minimising the circulation of counterfeit notes in the economy.

- Counterfeit currency is often linked to organised crime and terrorism financing; robust detection mechanisms disrupt such illicit networks.
- Protects against economic warfare tactics, where adversaries may attempt to destabilise the financial system through counterfeit currency.
- Ensures adherence to the Reserve Bank of India's Master Direction on Counterfeit Notes, reinforcing legal and procedural frameworks.

Challenges

- **Technological Limitations** — Dependence on manual inspection in branches lacking authentication machines may lead to undetected counterfeit notes entering circulation.
- **Human Resource Constraints** — Inadequate training and high turnover of cash-handling staff in banks reduce the effectiveness of detection efforts.
- **Cross-Border Circulation** — International borders, particularly with Nepal and Bangladesh, serve as hotspots for counterfeit currency smuggling, complicating detection efforts.
- **Legal and Procedural Gaps** — Inconsistent enforcement of penalties for non-compliance with RBI directives undermines deterrence against counterfeit currency circulation.

Relevance for Prelims

FICN, Counterfeit Currency, RBI Master Direction, Note Authentication Machines, Forged Note Vigilance Cells, Currency Chest, ATM Dispensation, Impounding of Counterfeit Notes, Detection of Counterfeit Notes, Border Areas, Action Taken Report (ATR)

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Master Direction on Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs): 1. Banks are mandated to return detected counterfeit notes to the tenderer to maintain customer trust. 2. All banknotes received by banks must be examined for authenticity using machines. 3. The RBI has prescribed specific deadlines for training cash-handling staff in border areas. 4. Banks are penalised for non-impounding of counterfeit notes in currency remittances to RBI. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All

Answer: Only three — Statement 1 is incorrect as counterfeit notes must never be returned to the tenderer. Statements 2, 3, and 4 are correct as per the RBI's Master Direction.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed banks to equip branches in districts with international borders with Note Authentication/Sorting Machines. Reason (R): Counterfeit currency detection is more critical in border areas due to higher circulation of FICNs. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Both A and R are true, and R correctly explains A, as border areas are prioritised for enhanced detection due to higher risks of FICN circulation.

Mains practice question

✍️ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently reinforced its Master Direction on Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) to enhance detection, reporting, and monitoring mechanisms. Critically analyse the efficacy of these measures in curbing the menace of counterfeit currency in India. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction: Define FICNs and their economic/security implications (e.g., erosion of public trust, funding terrorism, inflationary pressures).

2. RBI's Master Direction Provisions:

- Mandatory machine-based authentication of all banknotes.
- Impounding and reporting of counterfeit notes; penalties for non-compliance.
- Training and awareness programs for cash-handling staff, with deadlines for border areas.
- ...

Six Years of NEP 2020: Evaluating Progress and Persistent Gaps in India's Education Reforms



Mind map: Six Years of NEP 2020: Evaluating Progress and Persistent

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations (Education Sector Reforms) • GS Paper III — Human Resource Development, Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services

Why is this in news?

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet on 29 July 2020, has completed six years, prompting an assessment of its

implementation. While

visible progress has been made in curriculum restructuring and early childhood education, critical reforms such as the establishment of a unified higher education regulator, teacher education overhaul, examination reforms, and adequate funding remain unfulfilled. The policy's implementation coincides with heightened scrutiny due to recent controversies in competitive examinations, underscoring the urgency of systemic reforms.

REMEMBER

NEP 2020's most visible progress lies in curriculum restructuring (5+3+3+4 model, Jaadui Pitara), while critical reforms—unified regulator, teacher education overhaul, examination integrity, and funding—remain stalled.

Key Points

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 replaced the 1986 National Policy on Education, marking the first comprehensive overhaul in 34 years.
- NEP 2020 was approved by the Union Cabinet on 29 July 2020, with a vision to align India's education system with global standards while preserving cultural and contextual relevance.

- The policy introduced a 5+3+3+4 school structure, integrating early childhood care and education (ECCE) into the formal schooling framework.
- NEP 2020 proposed the merger of regulatory bodies (UGC, AICTE, NCTE) into a single Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), though this has not yet materialised.
- The policy emphasised foundational literacy and numeracy, with initiatives like the Jaadui Pitara learning kits for children aged 3–8 years.
- Funding for education, a critical enabler of all reforms, remains below the recommended 6% of GDP, with no concrete steps toward achieving this target.

What is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020?

- The NEP 2020 is a comprehensive framework for transforming India's education system, replacing the 1986 policy to address contemporary challenges in access, equity, and quality.
- It introduces a 5+3+3+4 school structure, replacing the traditional 10+2 model, to align with cognitive developmental stages from ages 3 to 18.
- The policy integrates early childhood care and education (ECCE) into the formal schooling system, with initiatives like Jaadui Pitara and the ECCE framework for anganwadi centres.
- Higher education reforms include the introduction of a credit-based academic system, allowing students to exit degrees midway with certifications, and the promotion of foreign universities in India.
- The policy proposes the establishment of a single higher education regulator (HECI) to replace UGC, AICTE, and NCTE, though this remains pending.

- Teacher education reforms aim to overhaul curriculum and standards, but implementation is partial, with gaps in training and accreditation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
5+3+3+4 School Structure Replacement	Reorganises school education into a continuum spanning early childhood to secondary stages, aligning with cognitive development stages and reducing rigid age-based segregation.
National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023	Provides the pedagogical and curricular foundation for textbooks, teacher training, and assessment reforms, replacing the 1988 framework.
Jaadui Pitara and ECCE Framework	Integrates play-based learning for ages 3–8, formalising early childhood education within the school system and anganwadi centres.
Credit Bank and Mid-Exit Degrees	Introduces flexibility in higher education, enabling students to accumulate and transfer credits across institutions, and exit with certificates/diplomas.
Foreign University Campuses in India	Facilitates internationalisation of higher education, allowing foreign institutions to operate under simplified regulatory conditions.

Significance for India

- Shifts focus from rote memorisation to competency-based and experiential learning, particularly in foundational literacy and numeracy through NIPUN Bharat.

- Emphasises multilingualism and Indian knowledge systems while integrating global best practices in curriculum design.
- Formalises early childhood education (ECCE) by integrating anganwadi centres with primary schools, enhancing continuity in learning.
- Introduces PARAKH as a standard-setting body for assessment reforms, aiming to reduce examination-centric stress and improve learning outcomes.
- Facilitates cross-border mobility for students and faculty by allowing foreign universities to operate in India under a simplified regulatory regime.

Challenges

- **Regulatory Reforms Stalled** — The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), envisioned to replace UGC, AICTE, and NCTE, remains unimplemented due to inter-ministerial and inter-state coordination delays.
- **Examination System Vulnerabilities** — Widespread NEET paper leaks and irregularities expose systemic weaknesses in examination governance, undermining trust in assessment mechanisms.
- **Funding and Resource Gaps** — The policy's target of public expenditure on education at 6% of GDP remains unmet, with current allocations hovering around 3–4% in recent budgets.
- **Teacher Training and Capacity Building** — The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2023 is yet to be fully operationalised, leaving gaps in teacher preparation aligned with NEP's pedagogical goals.

Relevance for Prelims

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, 5+3+3+4 school structure, PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan, NIPUN Bharat, Jaadui Pitara, ECCE framework, UGC-AICTE-NCTE merger, credit banking in higher education, foreign universities in India

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: 1. The NEP 2020 replaces the 10+2 school structure with a 5+3+3+4 framework. 2. The NEP 2020 mandates the establishment of the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA) to replace UGC, AICTE, and NCTE. 3. The NIPUN Bharat Mission aims to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy by 2026. 4. The NEP 2020 introduces a credit bank system for undergraduate students to facilitate midway exit from degree programmes. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All four

Answer: All four — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as the NIPUN Bharat Mission aims to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025, not 2026.

Q2. Assertion (A): The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has released new textbooks for classes 1 to 9 under the NEP 2020 framework. Reason (R): The NEP 2020 mandates a complete overhaul of the school curriculum, including the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

framework. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is true as NCERT has indeed released new textbooks for classes 1 to 9. Reason (R) is also true as the NEP 2020 mandates an overhaul of the curriculum, including ECCE. However, R does not directly explain A, as the release of textbooks is a separate implementation step.

Mains practice question

 Critically analyse the implementation trajectory of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, six years after its adoption. To what extent have the structural reforms in school education, higher education governance, and foundational learning initiatives been realised? Substantiate your response with reference to key provisions, institutional mechanisms, and contemporary challenges. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks): Briefly outline the NEP 2020's vision and its structural pillars (5+3+3+4 framework, ECCE integration, credit bank system, NHERA).

2. School Education Reforms (4 marks):

- **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** Transition to 5+3+3+4 structure; NCERT textbooks for classes 1–9; Jaadui Pitara for ECCE.
- **Foundational Learning:** NIPUN Bharat Mission and PARAKH ...

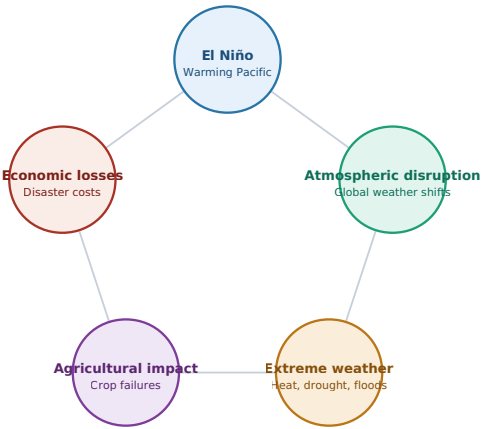
International Relations



Section at a glance: International Relations

El Niño Phenomenon: Climatic Implications and Global Preparedness for 2026-27

El Niño ENSO Cycle



El Niño ENSO Cycle

GS Paper I — Geography (Climate and Weather Systems) • GS Paper III — Environment and Disaster Management

📌 El Niño is a periodic warming of the central-eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean that disrupts global weather patterns by weakening trade winds and altering the Walker Circulation, leading to extreme...

Why is this in news?

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has issued a warning regarding the intensification of a strong El Niño event from August to October 2026, with

projections indicating sea surface temperature anomalies exceeding 2.9°C in key monitoring regions. This development is critical as it amplifies global weather extremes, including heat domes, wildfires, and altered precipitation patterns, necessitating urgent preparedness measures across climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, health, and disaster management.

PRELIMS POINTER

El Niño is a periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, disrupting global weather patterns through its interaction with atmospheric circulation systems.

Key Points

- El Niño is a periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, disrupting global weather patterns through its interaction with atmospheric circulation systems.
- The phenomenon occurs irregularly every 2-7 years.

- El Niño events are part of the broader El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, which also includes the cooling phase known as La Niña and neutral conditions.
- The current El Niño is developing against a backdrop of unprecedented ocean heat and rising global temperatures, exacerbated by anthropogenic climate change, as highlighted by the UN Secretary-General.
- Historical data indicates that strong El Niño events are often associated with heightened risks of extreme weather events, including hurricanes in the Pacific, droughts in Australia, and disruptions to the Indian monsoon.
- The WMO's early warning system and climate information services are designed to provide actionable insights to governments and communities for mitigating potential impacts.

What is El Niño?

- El Niño is a climate phenomenon characterized by the abnormal warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, typically peaking around December to January.
- It is one component of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, which also includes La Niña (cooling phase) and neutral conditions, with each phase influencing global weather patterns differently.
- The warming of ocean waters during El Niño weakens or reverses the trade winds, disrupting the Walker Circulation—a large-scale atmospheric circulation pattern over the tropical Pacific—and altering global precipitation and temperature distributions.

- Key monitoring regions for El Niño include Nino 1+2, Nino 3, Nino 3.4, and Nino 4, with Nino 3.4 being the most commonly referenced index for assessing the strength and phase of ENSO.
- Strong El Niño events are often associated with increased rainfall in the southern United States, Peru, and Ecuador, while causing severe droughts in Australia, Indonesia, and parts of southern Africa.
- The Indian monsoon is typically weakened during El Niño years, leading to below-average rainfall and potential agricultural distress in India, though the correlation is not absolute due to the influence of other climate factors such as the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD).

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Intensification of El Niño (August–October 2026)	Predicted to exacerbate global temperature anomalies and alter precipitation patterns, with multi-model forecasts indicating sea-surface temperature anomalies exceeding 2.9°C in key monitoring regions.
Global Temperature Anomalies	Above-normal temperatures projected worldwide, contributing to extreme weather events such as heat domes, wildfires, and record-high sea surface temperatures.
Regional Precipitation Variability	Wetter conditions expected in some regions, while others face heightened drought risks, disrupting agricultural cycles and water availability.
Early Warning Systems (WMO)	Enhanced coordination and climate information services to support decision-making in climate-

Feature	Significance
	sensitive sectors such as agriculture, health, and disaster management.
Fossil Fuel Dependence	Critically linked to the intensification of El Niño, as continued reliance on coal, oil, and gas exacerbates climate crises and fuels extreme weather events.

Significance for India

- Accelerates global warming trends, pushing planetary temperatures closer to or beyond critical thresholds identified in climate science.
- Increases frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including heatwaves, droughts, and floods, with cascading ecological impacts.
- Disrupts agricultural productivity, leading to crop failures, food price volatility, and supply chain disruptions in vulnerable regions.
- Increases economic losses from climate-related disasters, straining public finances and insurance systems in affected countries.
- Exacerbates health risks, including heat stress, vector-borne diseases, and respiratory illnesses, particularly in vulnerable populations.

Challenges

- **Climate-Induced Disaster Risk** — Increased frequency of extreme weather events threatens infrastructure, livelihoods, and public safety, particularly in vulnerable regions.

- **Food Security Threats** — Disruption of monsoon patterns and agricultural cycles leads to reduced crop yields, particularly for staple cereals like rice and wheat.
- **Health Crisis Amplification** — Heatwaves and extreme weather events increase mortality rates, particularly among the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing conditions.
- **Economic Resilience Deficits** — Climate-related disasters strain public finances, diverting resources from development priorities to emergency response and recovery.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO): 1. El Niño is characterized by the warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. 2. La Niña is associated with cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures in the same region. 3. ENSO events have no significant impact on the Indian monsoon system. 4. The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) is a measure of the atmospheric component of ENSO. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as ENSO events significantly influence the Indian monsoon, often leading to deficient rainfall during El Niño years.

Q2. Assertion (A): The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has warned that a strong El Niño is developing and is expected to intensify during August–October 2026. Reason (R): El Niño events

are driven by natural ocean-atmosphere interactions and are not influenced by anthropogenic climate change. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is true as per the WMO's warning. Reason (R) is false because while El Niño is a natural phenomenon, its intensity and frequency are increasingly influenced by anthropogenic climate change.

Mains practice question

✍ El Niño events are often described as 'global climate disruptors'. Critically examine the validity of this assertion with reference to their impact on global weather patterns, regional economies, and human security. Also, analyse the role of international institutions like the WMO in mitigating these impacts. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Definition and Mechanism of El Niño:

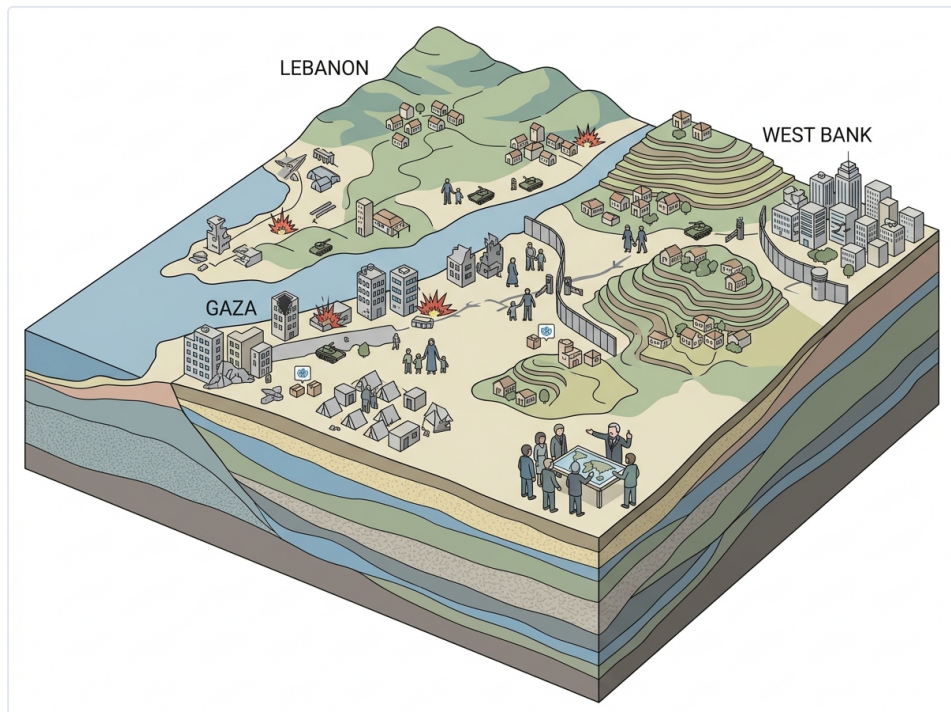
- Brief explanation of El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) as a coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon.
- Role of sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies in the tropical Pacific and the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI).

2. Global Weather Disruptions:

- **Temperature Anomalies:** Widespread above-normal temperatures, heat domes, and record sea ...

Escalation of Civilian Casualties and Humanitarian Crisis in the Middle East: Legal

and Geopolitical Implications for UPSC Aspirants



3D cutaway: Middle East

GS Paper II — International Relations — Conflict Resolution, Role of UN and International Organisations • GS Paper II — International Relations — India's Foreign Policy and Middle East • GS Paper III — Internal Security — Challenges of Asymmetric Warfare and Civilian Protection

Why is this in news?

The sustained escalation of hostilities across Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank, resulting in a mounting civilian death toll and severe humanitarian disruptions, has drawn urgent international attention.

The UN Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities underscores the gravity of the situation, particularly the disproportionate impact on children and the systematic erosion of humanitarian access. This development is critical for UPSC aspirants as it intersects with core syllabus themes of international law, conflict resolution, and India's strategic engagements in the Middle East.

Key Points

- The West Bank has seen a resurgence of violence since 2023, with 1,122 Palestinian fatalities, including 246 children, as per OCHA reports, highlighting the persistent challenges to Palestinian self-determination and Israeli security policies.
- The humanitarian blockade in Gaza, exacerbated by restrictions on fuel, medical supplies, and food aid, has crippled critical infrastructure, including 62 water wells and over half of UNRWA's operational fleet, as documented by UN agencies.
- The UN's invocation of international humanitarian law (IHL) and calls for humanitarian corridors reflect the systemic failure to protect civilians in asymmetric warfare, a recurring theme in modern conflict zones.

Understanding the Current Escalation in the Middle East: Legal and Humanitarian Dimensions

- ****International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Civilian Protection****: The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols mandate the protection of civilians in armed conflict, prohibiting indiscriminate attacks, collective punishment, and the use of human shields. The current crisis

violates these principles, as evidenced by the high civilian toll in Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank.

- **Role of UN Agencies**: UNRWA and OCHA play pivotal roles in documenting casualties, facilitating aid, and advocating for ceasefires. Their reports highlight the operational constraints imposed by hostilities, including restricted aid access and the destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- **Asymmetric Warfare and Non-State Actors**: The involvement of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, alongside state actors such as Israel, Iran, and the US, exemplifies the complexity of modern conflicts. Asymmetric tactics—such as rocket attacks, targeted assassinations, and urban warfare—complicate traditional notions of military engagement and civilian immunity.
- **Humanitarian Corridors and Ceasefires**: Proposals for humanitarian corridors aim to ensure safe passage for civilians and aid workers. However, the absence of sustained ceasefires and the militarisation of aid routes undermine these efforts, as seen in Gaza's 'green zone' and Lebanon's southern border.
- **Regional Geopolitics**: The crisis is exacerbated by regional power dynamics, including Iran's support for proxy groups, US military interventions, and the broader Sunni-Shia sectarian divide. This geopolitical fragmentation hinders diplomatic solutions and prolongs civilian suffering.
- **Children as Primary Victims**: UNICEF reports indicate that children constitute a disproportionate share of casualties, with incidents such as the Qeshm Island strike underscoring the indiscriminate nature of violence. The psychological and physical trauma inflicted on children is a long-term humanitarian crisis.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Rising civilian casualties in Gaza, Lebanon, and West Bank	Violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and disproportionate impact on non-combatants, escalating regional instability.
UN Secretary-General's call for immediate ceasefire	Diplomatic pressure to halt hostilities and restore humanitarian access, reflecting UN's role in conflict resolution.
Restrictions on aid entry into Gaza	Deliberate obstructions to humanitarian supplies exacerbate food, water, and medical shortages, violating IHL obligations.
Children as disproportionate victims of conflict	Systematic targeting of civilian infrastructure (schools, homes) contravenes UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Additional Protocol I (1977).
Iran-US military exchanges and regional spillover	Escalation risks broader conflict, drawing in non-state actors and complicating ceasefire negotiations.

Significance for India

- Mass displacement and civilian fatalities violate the principle of distinction under IHL, which mandates protection of non-combatants.
- Collapse of healthcare systems in Gaza and Lebanon due to airstrikes and restricted aid access, leading to preventable deaths.

- Regionalisation of the Israel-Hamas conflict into a multi-front war involving Lebanon, Iran, and the West Bank, threatening Middle East security architecture.
- US-Iran proxy dynamics intensify, with implications for global energy markets and nuclear non-proliferation efforts.
- Violations of the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols, particularly Articles 48, 51(2), and 57, concerning proportionality and precaution in attacks.

Relevance for Prelims

OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) · UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) · Geneva Conventions · International Humanitarian Law (IHL) · Humanitarian corridors · Ceasefire agreements · Westphalian sovereignty · Asymmetric warfare

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA): 1. UNRWA provides humanitarian aid, education, health, and social services to registered Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. 2. UNRWA is funded primarily by voluntary contributions from UN member states and private donors. 3. UNRWA's mandate includes the protection of civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals in conflict zones. 4. UNRWA has the authority to enforce ceasefires in Gaza and the West Bank. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three

4. All four

Answer: Only three — Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct as they align with UNRWA's established mandate and funding mechanisms. Statement 4 is incorrect because UNRWA does not have the authority to enforce ceasefires; this responsibility lies with UN peacekeeping missions or relevant conflict parties.

Q2. Assertion (A): The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is mandated to protect the rights of children in armed conflict under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Reason (R): UNICEF provides humanitarian aid, including medical and psychosocial support, to children affected by conflict, but does not engage in advocacy for international humanitarian law compliance. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is true as UNICEF's mandate includes protecting children's rights in armed conflict under the CRC. Reason (R) is false because UNICEF actively advocates for compliance with international humanitarian law, including IHL protections for children.

Mains practice question

✍ The escalation of hostilities in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon has resulted in severe civilian casualties, particularly among children, in violation of international humanitarian law. Critically examine the role of the United Nations and its agencies in addressing this humanitarian crisis, with reference to their

mandates, limitations, and the effectiveness of international legal frameworks. (15 Marks)

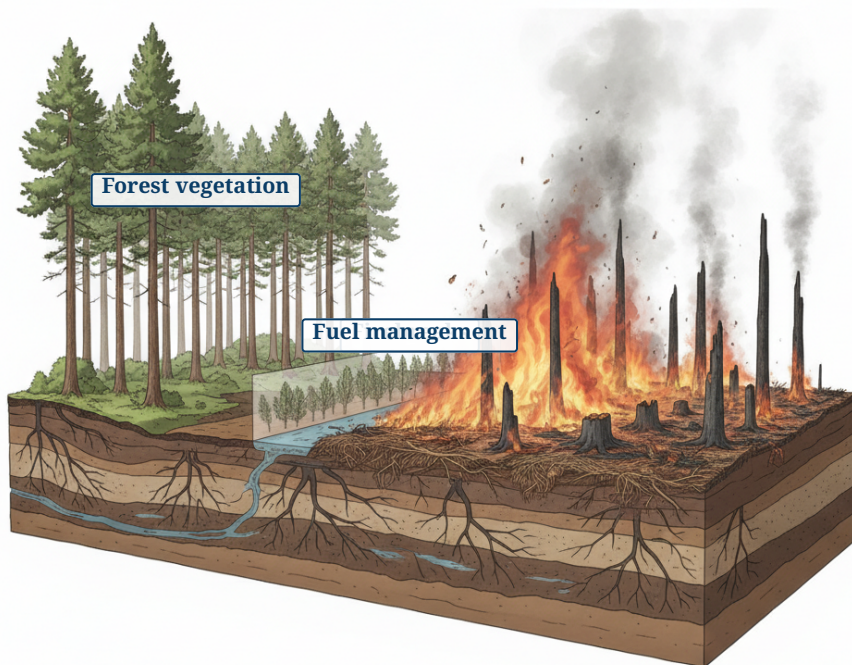
Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction (2 marks): Define the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, West Bank, and Lebanon, citing UN reports on civilian casualties (e.g., UNRWA and UNICEF data). Highlight the violation of IHL, particularly the protection of civilians and children under the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.

2. Mandates of UN Agencies (3 marks):

- UNRWA: ...

Wildfires in the Anthropocene: A Multidimensional Crisis Demanding Preventive Governance and Resilient Ecosystem Management



3D cutaway: Wildfires

GS Paper III — Environment, Disaster Management, and Climate Change • GS Paper III — Agriculture and Land Use • GS Paper II — International Cooperation and Sustainable Development

✎ *Wildfires are no longer exceptional events but predictable consequences of anthropogenic climate change and*

unsustainable land-use practices, necessitating a shift from reactive firefighting to...

Why is this in news?

The 2026 wildfire season has escalated into a transcontinental crisis, with Europe and North America experiencing unprecedented destruction of forests, displacement of communities, and economic losses. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has explicitly warned that while emergency response remains critical, the most effective strategy lies in prevention, sustainable forest management, and the creation of resilient landscapes. This underscores the urgent need for integrated governance approaches that address the root causes of wildfires, particularly anthropogenic pressures and climate change, within the framework of sustainable development and disaster risk reduction.

PRELIMS POINTER

Wildfires are not a novel phenomenon but have historically been part of natural ecological cycles, particularly in boreal and temperate forests, where fire regimes play a role in nutrient cycling and species...

Key Points

- Wildfires are not a novel phenomenon but have historically been part of natural ecological cycles, particularly in boreal and temperate forests, where fire regimes play a role in nutrient cycling and species regeneration.
- The frequency and intensity of wildfires have escalated globally over the past two decades.
- Climate change has extended fire seasons by increasing temperatures, prolonging droughts, intensifying heatwaves, and altering precipitation patterns, thereby exposing regions previously considered low-risk to severe wildfire events.

- Anthropogenic activities—such as land-use change, agricultural expansion, and urban encroachment—have significantly altered natural fire regimes, with approximately 90% of wildfires globally attributed to human causes, including negligence, arson, or poorly managed land-use practices.
- The European Union has identified wildfires as a critical component of its climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, particularly in Southern Europe, where Mediterranean climates are increasingly prone to extreme fire weather conditions.
- The economic and social costs of wildfires extend beyond immediate destruction, encompassing long-term ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss, health impacts from smoke pollution, and substantial financial burdens on national economies and insurance sectors.

What are Wildfires and Why Do They Matter?

- Wildfires, also known as bushfires or forest fires, are uncontrolled fires that spread rapidly through vegetation, often exacerbated by climatic conditions such as high temperatures, low humidity, and strong winds.
- They are a natural ecological process in many ecosystems, particularly in boreal forests, savannas, and Mediterranean-type climates, where they play a role in maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health by clearing dead vegetation and promoting new growth.
- However, the scale, intensity, and frequency of wildfires have increased dramatically in recent decades due to anthropogenic climate change, land-use changes, and unsustainable forest

management practices, transforming them from natural events into catastrophic disasters.

- Wildfires release significant quantities of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, contributing to the amplification of global warming through a dangerous feedback loop wherein climate change intensifies wildfires, which in turn release more carbon.
- The human and economic toll of wildfires is substantial, encompassing loss of life, displacement of communities, destruction of infrastructure, degradation of air quality, and long-term impacts on public health, agriculture, and tourism.
- Wildfires also pose a severe threat to biodiversity, particularly in regions with high endemism or endangered species, as they destroy habitats, disrupt food chains, and facilitate the spread of invasive species.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Geographical Spread	Wildfires in 2026 have affected Europe (434,000 hectares), North America (5.6 million hectares), and are expanding eastwards in the EU, particularly in Greece and Italy.
Human Activity as Primary Cause	Approximately 90% of wildfires are anthropogenic, stemming from negligence or deliberate acts, highlighting the role of public awareness and regulation in prevention.
Climate Change Amplification	Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and extended fire seasons are increasing the frequency, intensity, and unpredictability of wildfires globally.

Feature	Significance
Economic Impact	Annual EU losses from wildfires exceed €2.5 billion, encompassing infrastructure damage, tourism disruption, and post-fire restoration costs.
Ecological Feedback Loop	Wildfires release ~1.8 billion tonnes of CO ₂ annually, with boreal forest emissions nearly tripling since 2001, exacerbating climate change and creating a self-reinforcing cycle.

Significance for India

- Wildfires degrade ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and threaten endangered species, particularly in Mediterranean and boreal forests.
- Smoke dispersion from large fires affects air quality across continents, posing respiratory health risks to populations far from the source.
- Direct costs include property damage, infrastructure loss, and emergency response expenditures, while indirect costs encompass lost tourism revenue and agricultural productivity.
- Post-fire restoration requires substantial public and private investment, diverting resources from developmental priorities.
- Large-scale evacuations disrupt communities, strain emergency services, and create social displacement, particularly in tourist-dependent regions.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements about wildfires and their impacts: 1. Wildfires are primarily caused by natural factors such

as lightning strikes. 2. The European Union estimates that wildfires cost around 2.5 billion Euros annually due to infrastructure damage and economic losses. 3. Wildfires contribute to climate change by releasing significant amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. 4. Boreal forests in Europe, North America, and Central Asia have seen a decline in carbon emissions from wildfires over the past two decades. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two
3. Only three
4. All

Answer: Only three — Statements 2 and 3 are correct. Statement 1 is incorrect as human activity causes approximately 90% of wildfires. Statement 4 is incorrect as carbon emissions from boreal forest fires have nearly tripled between 2001 and 2023.

Q2. Assertion (A): Wildfires are a natural phenomenon and do not significantly contribute to climate change. Reason (R): Wildfires release carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, which exacerbates global warming. Options: A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A. C. A is true, but R is false. D. A is false, but R is true.

Answer: ? — Assertion (A) is false because wildfires are not solely natural and significantly contribute to climate change. Reason (R) is true as wildfires release carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

Mains practice question

✍️ Critically examine the assertion that 'prevention is the best defence' against wildfires in the context of climate change and human-driven land-use pressures. Substantiate your arguments with reference to global wildfire trends, economic impacts, and sustainable forest management strategies. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:

1. Introduction: Define wildfires and their dual role as natural and human-induced disasters, exacerbated by climate change and land-use pressures.
2. Global Trends: Cite UNECE data on hectares burned in Europe (434,000 in 2026) and North America (1.849 million hectares in the U.S., 3.77 million hectares in Canada), highlighting the escalating crisis.
3. ...

Environment

Plutus IAS

Monthly Test — Current Affairs

Objective

1. Consider the following statements regarding the semiconductor industry expansion in India: 1) Marvell Technology announced a \$250 million investment in India over the next three years. 2) The investment is part of a broader strategy to reduce India's dependence on semiconductor imports. 3) The expansion is expected to create significant job opportunities in the engineering sector. 4) The investment is solely focused on consumer electronics. How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
- (B) 2 and 3 only
- (C) 1, 2, and 3
- (D) All of the above

2. Assertion (A): The US-Iran military confrontation in 2026 has significant geopolitical implications for India. Reason (R): India has a strategic interest in maintaining stability in West Asia due to its energy security and diaspora population. Evaluate the assertion and reason.

- (A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- (B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- (C) A is true, but R is false.
- (D) A is false, but R is true.

3. Match the following bills with their respective objectives: 1) Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 2) Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 3) Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 4) Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill, 2014. a) Criminalises intentional insult to the national song *Vande Mataram* b) Introduces stringent penalties for examination paper leaks c) Amends the 1969 Act to streamline registration processes d) Legislative response to the Supreme Court's 2014 ruling on coal block allocations

(A) ['1-c, 2-b, 3-a, 4-d', '1-d, 2-a, 3-b, 4-c', '1-b, 2-c, 3-d, 4-a', '1-a, 2-d, 3-c, 4-b']

(B) answer_index_1

4. Consider the following statements regarding Cochin Shipyard's Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft: 1) The seventh Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft was launched on 29 July 2026. 2) These ships are designed for deep-sea anti-submarine warfare. 3) The launch underscores India's advancing indigenous shipbuilding capabilities. 4) The ships are named after coastal cities in India. How many of the above statements are correct?

(A) 1, 2, and 3 only

(B) 1, 3, and 4 only

(C) 2 and 4 only

(D) All of the above

5. Assertion (A): The ethical dilemma of AI training involving the digitisation of rare books for cultural preservation is driven by bulk purchase requests from AI firms. Reason (R):

The practice often leads to the destruction of the original books after digitisation. Evaluate the assertion and reason.

- (A)** Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- (B)** Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- (C)** A is true, but R is false.
- (D)** A is false, but R is true.

6. Consider the following statements regarding foundational literacy and numeracy in India: 1) The rapid adoption of AI in education has addressed systemic failures in foundational literacy and numeracy. 2) AI tools are promising but cannot compensate for systemic failures in foundational skills. 3) The article highlights the need for systemic reforms to address foundational literacy and numeracy. 4) Foundational literacy and numeracy are prerequisites for AI-driven educational equity. How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A)** 2, 3, and 4 only
- (B)** 1 and 3 only
- (C)** 1, 2, and 4 only
- (D)** All of the above

7. Match the following news items with their respective domains: 1) Chandrayaan-5 mission 2) Cauvery Water Dispute 3) NHRC's suo motu action on sewer death 4) Constitutional right to voluntary religious conversion. a) Space exploration b) Inter-state water governance c) Human rights and occupational safety d) Personal liberty and autonomy

- (A)** ['1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-d', '1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-c', '1-c, 2-d, 3-a, 4-b', '1-d, 2-c, 3-b, 4-a']
- (B)** answer_index_0

8. Consider the following statements regarding the Vikasit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan (VBSA) Bill: 1) The bill aims to address systemic challenges in India's higher education sector. 2) It seeks to reduce regulatory overlap in higher education governance. 3) The bill is focused solely on primary education reforms. 4) The bill has been widely accepted without debate. How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
- (B) 2 and 3 only
- (C) 1, 2, and 4 only
- (D) All of the above

9. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court's ruling on ex post facto environmental clearances in 2026 quashed a 2021 Office Memorandum. Reason (R): The 2021 OM permitted ex post facto environmental clearances for infrastructure projects, which the Supreme Court held to be administrative overreach. Evaluate the assertion and reason.

- (A) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- (B) Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- (C) A is true, but R is false.
- (D) A is false, but R is true.

10. Consider the following statements regarding the Constitutional right to voluntary religious conversion: 1) The Allahabad High Court reaffirmed the right to voluntarily convert one's religion in a judgment delivered on 31 July 2026. 2) The judgment also affirmed the right to choose a spouse of one's own free will. 3) The judgment criminalised forced

religious conversions. 4) The judgment is binding on all state governments. How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
- (B) 1, 2, and 4 only
- (C) 2, 3, and 4 only
- (D) All of the above

Descriptive

1. Examine the strategic significance of India's indigenous shipbuilding capabilities, as exemplified by Cochin Shipyard's Mahe-class ASW Shallow Water Craft, in enhancing coastal security and reducing dependency on foreign defence imports. (150 words) (10)

Expected points:

- India's indigenous shipbuilding reflects 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' in defence manufacturing, reducing reliance on imports.
- Mahe-class ASW Ships enhance coastal security by addressing sub-surface threats in shallow waters.
- Indigenisation strengthens India's naval deterrence and supports 'Make in India' initiatives.
- Technological advancements in ASW capabilities align with India's broader maritime security strategy.
- Challenges: Infrastructure gaps, skilled workforce shortages, and funding constraints in defence production.

2. Critically analyse the ethical and cultural implications of AI firms digitising and destroying rare books for training purposes, as highlighted in the news. Discuss how this practice conflicts with India's efforts towards preserving cultural heritage. (250 words) (15)

Expected points:

- AI training requires vast datasets, often sourced from rare books, leading to their destruction post-digitisation.
- Conflict with India's cultural preservation goals: rare books are part of intangible heritage and historical knowledge.
- Ethical concerns: commodification of cultural assets without consent or compensation to custodians.
- Legal gaps: absence of clear regulations on AI data sourcing from cultural repositories.
- India's initiatives like 'National Mission for Manuscripts' aim to preserve heritage, but AI digitisation may undermine these efforts.
- Need for balanced policies: AI innovation vs. ethical sourcing and cultural conservation.

3. Discuss the constitutional and legislative dimensions of the Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and its implications for civil registration systems in India. (250 words) (15)

Expected points:

- Bill amends the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1969, to introduce digital registration and Aadhaar-based authentication.
- Constitutional context: Article 246 (Union List) empowers Parliament to legislate on registration of births and deaths.
- Implications for civil registration: improved accuracy, reduced fraud, and real-time data for governance.
- Challenges: digital divide, privacy concerns with Aadhaar linkage, and implementation hurdles in rural areas.
- Opposition protests highlight concerns over data security and potential misuse of personal information.
- Aligns with India's digital governance goals but requires robust safeguards for citizen rights.

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Answer Key

Objective

1. **(C)** Statements 1, 2, and 3 are correct as per the news item. Statement 4 is incorrect because the investment is not solely focused on consumer electronics.
2. **(B)** Both the assertion and reason are true, and the reason correctly explains the assertion as India's energy security and diaspora in West Asia are directly impacted by regional stability.
3. **(A)** 1 matches with c (streamlines registration processes), 2 matches with b (penalties for paper leaks), 3 matches with a (criminalises insult to *Vande Mataram*), and 4 matches with d (response to Supreme Court ruling on coal blocks).
4. **(B)** Statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect because these ships are designed for shallow-water anti-submarine warfare.
5. **(A)** Both the assertion and reason are true, and the reason correctly explains the assertion as the bulk purchase requests from AI firms often result in the destruction of the original books after digitisation.
6. **(A)** Statements 2, 3, and 4 are correct. Statement 1 is incorrect because AI adoption has not addressed systemic failures in foundational literacy and numeracy.
7. **(A)** 1 matches with a (space exploration), 2 matches with b (inter-state water governance), 3 matches with c (human rights

and occupational safety), and 4 matches with d (personal liberty and autonomy).

8. **(A)** Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect because the bill focuses on higher education, not primary education. Statement 4 is incorrect as the bill has reignited debates on its efficacy.
9. **(A)** Both the assertion and reason are true, and the reason correctly explains the assertion as the Supreme Court quashed the 2021 OM for permitting ex post facto clearances, deeming it administrative overreach.
10. **(A)** Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as the judgment did not criminalise forced conversions. Statement 4 is incorrect as the judgment is not binding on all state governments.