Plutus IAS

UPSC & State PCS

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY

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- Mains Test Series
- Offline / Online / Hybrid Batches

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Editor's Note

This monthly current-affairs compilation is designed to holistically cover 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.

This issue is prepared to help you internalise the interlinkages of static and dynamic news events, and to sharpen the conceptual clarity the exam actually tests.

— Aanya, your Current Affairs teacher, Plutus IAS

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Upcoming Exam Calendar

Updated till 2026-08-30. 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

Notification Jan 2027

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 CDS (I) 2027

Admit card expected soon

Notification	2 Dec 2026	Apply by	22 Dec 2026
Prelims	11 Apr 2027 (written)	Interview	SSB interview after result
Fee	Rs 200 (Gen); SC/ST/ Women exempt		

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

UPSC NDA & NA (I) 2027

Prelims exam date announced

Notification	2 Dec 2026	Apply by	22 Dec 2026
Prelims	11 Apr 2027 (written)	Interview	SSB interview after result
Fee	Rs 100 (Gen); SC/ST exempt		

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

UPSC CAPF (AC) 2027

PST/PET shortlist released

Notification	~Feb 2027 (exact date TBA)	Apply by	Mar-Apr 2027 (tent.)
Prelims	4 Jul 2027 (written, tent.)	Interview	Physical + Interview after result
Fee	Rs 200 (Gen); SC/ST/ Women exempt		

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

UPPSC PCS 2026 (Uttar Pradesh)

Mains exam completed

Notification	25 Jun 2026 (out)	Apply by	3 Aug 2026 (extended; closed — correction till 10 Aug)
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)

Interview document submission notice

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)

Prelims rescheduled to 6 Dec 2026

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

Typing Computer Test cancelled

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 expected Aug-Sep); 72nd: after Prelims
Interview	71st: Oct-Nov 2026 (tent., after Mains result)	Fee	Rs 600 (Gen); Rs 150 (Bihar SC/ST/PwD/Women)

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

HPSC HCS (Haryana Civil Services) 2026

Interview scheduled

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

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

UKPSC PCS / Upper Subordinate 2026 (Uttarakhand)

Short notice out (63 posts) — Prelims proposed early Oct 2026

Notification	Short notice out (63 posts); detailed advt shortly	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

WBPSC WBCS 2026 (West Bengal)

Interview schedule released for WBCS 2023

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)

Reopening of application window

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

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

HPPSC HAS/HPAS 2026 (Himachal Pradesh)

Personality Test result out

Notification	Awaited (~Aug 2026 expected, unconfirmed)	Apply by	TBA
Prelims	Nov 2026 (tent., unconfirmed)	Mains	TBA
Interview	TBA	Fee	Check official (hppsc.hp.gov.in)

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

RBI Grade B 2026

Phase 2 result out

Notification	29 Apr 2026 (out)	Apply by	20 May 2026 (closed)
Prelims	Phase I: 13-14 Jun 2026 (done; result 25 Jun)	Mains	Phase II: 25-26 Jul 2026 (done; result expected Aug-Sep)
Interview	After Phase II result	Fee	Rs 850 (Gen/OBC/EWS); Rs 100 (SC/ST/PwBD)

Official notification · Syllabus & prep

CLAT 2027 (UG & PG)

–

Official notification

AILET 2027 (NLU Delhi)

–

Official notification

AIBE (All India Bar Examination)

Registration open

Official notification

Bihar Civil Judge (PCS-J)

PET postponed

Official notification

UP PCS-J (Civil Judge)

–

Official notification

CUET UG 2027

Admit Card Released

Official notification

CBSE Class 12 Board 2027

Supplementary result out

Official notification

NABARD Grade A 2026

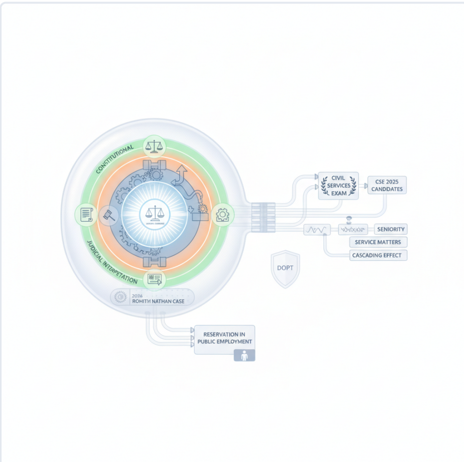
—

Official notification

Polity

Section at a glance: Polity

POLITY Judicial Interpretation of OBC Creamy-Layer Criteria: Implications for Reservation Policy and Civil Service Recruitment



X-ray view: OBC creamy-layer criteria

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance (Constitutional Provisions, Judicial Review) • GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude (Reservation Policy and Social Justice)

✎ *The OBC creamy-layer criteria exclude the economically advanced sections within the OBC category from reservation benefits, with the income/wealth test being a critical component; the Supreme Court's...*

Why is this in news?

PRELIMS POINTER

The Supreme Court's judgment in *Union of India v. Rohith Nathan* (March 11, 2026) clarified the interpretation of the income/wealth test under the OBC creamy-layer exclusion framework, particularly for candidates whose...

The Supreme Court of India has agreed to consider setting up a special Bench to hear the Union Government's plea seeking clarification on the applicability of its March 11, 2026 judgment on OBC creamy-layer criteria to candidates of the Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2025. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has argued that retrospective implementation of the judgment could have a cascading effect on settled service matters, potentially altering seniority and triggering contestations from candidates across all categories. This development underscores the intersection of judicial interpretation, policy implementation, and constitutional provisions governing reservations in public employment.

Key Points

- The Supreme Court's judgment in Union of India v. Rohith Nathan (March 11, 2026) clarified the interpretation of the income/wealth test under the OBC creamy-layer exclusion framework, particularly for candidates whose parents are employed in non-government or private sector roles.

- The income/wealth test is a critical component of the OBC reservation policy, designed to exclude the 'creamy layer'—those deemed economically advanced within the OBC category—from availing reservation benefits in public employment and education.
- The Union Government has contended that retrospective application of the March 11 judgment could disrupt the seniority of officers appointed since 2012, as well as create administrative challenges in re-evaluating past selections and recruitments.
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has sought directions to allow service allocation for 958 CSE-2025 candidates based on the pre-March 11 creamy-layer criteria, citing difficulties in implementing the judgment retroactively.
- The issue highlights the tension between judicial pronouncements and policy implementation, particularly in matters involving constitutional reservations and public employment.
- The Supreme Court's intervention underscores the need for clarity in the application of reservation policies, especially in high-stakes examinations like the CSE, which determine entry into the civil services.

What is the OBC Creamy-Layer Criteria?

- The OBC creamy-layer criteria are exclusion norms applied to identify and exclude the 'creamy layer'—economically advanced sections—within the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category from availing reservation benefits in public employment and education.

- The income/wealth test is a key component of the creamy-layer criteria, which assesses the economic status of the candidate's parents or guardians to determine eligibility for reservation benefits.
- The Supreme Court, in its March 11, 2026 judgment (Union of India v. Rohith Nathan), clarified that the income/wealth test must be applied uniformly, regardless of whether the parents are employed in government service, public sector undertakings (PSUs), or private sector roles.
- The judgment addressed the disparity in the application of the income test, where candidates whose parents were employed in government service were often granted exemptions or leniency, while those in non-government roles faced stricter scrutiny.
- The creamy-layer criteria aim to ensure that reservation benefits reach the most disadvantaged sections of the OBC category, thereby promoting social justice and equity in access to public employment and education.
- The criteria are periodically reviewed and updated by the Government of India, with the latest guidelines issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Supreme Court's March 11, 2026 judgment (Rohith Nathan case)	Established a precedent on the interpretation of the income/wealth test for OBC creamy-layer exclusion, particularly for parents employed in non-governmental sectors, addressing discriminatory application.

Feature	Significance
Department of Personnel and Training's (DoPT) plea	Seeks clarification on the retrospective applicability of the March 11 judgment to the Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2025, to prevent disruption in service allocation.
Income/wealth test for OBC creamy layer	A critical component of reservation policy aimed at excluding affluent sections of OBCs from benefits, ensuring equitable distribution of reservation quotas.
Cascading effect on service matters	Retrospective implementation could alter seniority, performance-based promotions, and settled service records, leading to administrative and legal complications.
Equivalence of posts in government and non-government sectors	The judgment highlights the need for a uniform framework to assess income/wealth across sectors, preventing arbitrary exclusion of OBC candidates.

Relevance for Prelims

OBC creamy layer · Article 16(4) of the Constitution · Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) · Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) · Rohith Nathan case (Union of India v. Rohith Nathan) · Civil Services Examination (CSE) · Income/Wealth Test for OBC Reservation · Seniority in Public Employment

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the OBC creamy-layer criteria in India: 1. The creamy layer refers to the economically advanced section of the OBCs who are excluded from reservation benefits. 2. The Supreme Court in its March 11, 2026 judgment clarified the income test for determining creamy layer status. 3. The DoPT has sought retrospective application of the Supreme Court's judgment on OBC creamy-layer criteria for CSE-2025 candidates. 4. The creamy layer criteria apply uniformly to all OBC candidates without any exceptions. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 2 are correct. The creamy layer excludes economically advanced OBCs from reservation benefits, and the Supreme Court clarified the income test in its March 11, 2026 judgment. Statement 3 is incorrect as the DoPT opposes retrospective application of the judgment. Statement 4 is incorrect as the criteria include exceptions, such as for posts without government equivalence.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court's March 11, 2026 judgment on OBC creamy-layer criteria addressed the income test for candidates whose parents are employed in posts without government equivalence. Reason (R): The judgment aimed to prevent hostile discrimination against OBC candidates whose parents are employed in PSUs or private sectors compared to those in government service. 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 Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true, and R correctly explains A. The judgment specifically addressed the income test for parents employed in non-government posts to prevent discrimination.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the constitutional and administrative implications of retrospective application of judicial verdicts in matters of reservation policy, with particular reference to the Supreme Court's March 11, 2026 judgment on OBC creamy-layer criteria. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction: Define the OBC creamy-layer criteria and its constitutional basis under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution. Briefly state the Supreme Court's March 11, 2026 judgment and its key findings on the income test for creamy layer determination.
2. Constitutional and Legal Framework:
• Articles 15(4) and 16(4): Reservation for socially …

POLITY Judicial Scrutiny of Ethanol Blending in Petrol: Legal and Policy Dimensions for UPSC Preparation

X-ray view: Petrol pump ethanol labels

Ethanol content label · Vehicle compatibility database · Ethanol-blended fuel · E20 fuel standard · Fuel efficiency metric · Engine compatibility guide

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Statutory Governance • GS Paper III — Environment and Sustainable Development, Energy Resources

Why is this in news?

REMEMBER

The Supreme Court's hearing on August 31, 2026, on mandatory ethanol labelling and vehicle compatibility for E20 underscores the need for transparent governance, consumer rights protection, and evidence-based policy...

The Supreme Court of India is scheduled to hear on August 31, 2026, a public interest litigation seeking mandatory and uniform labelling of ethanol content at petrol pumps, vehicle-wise compatibility databases, and a transparent transition framework for ethanol-blended fuels. The petition raises critical governance questions regarding consumer rights, environmental impact, and the technical feasibility of the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), particularly E20, necessitating judicial oversight over executive actions in energy policy.

Key Points

- Concerns have been raised by automobile manufacturers, consumer groups, and environmentalists regarding the compatibility of existing vehicle fleets with higher ethanol blends, potential impacts on fuel efficiency, engine longevity, and food-security trade-offs due to diversion of food crops for ethanol production.

What is the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) and E20?

- Ethanol blending can reduce tail-pipe emissions of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons but may increase nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions in some engine configurations. The net environmental impact depends on the lifecycle emissions of ethanol production, including land-use changes and water consumption.
- The transition to E20 poses challenges for legacy vehicles not designed for higher ethanol blends, necessitating retrofitting, alternative fuel availability, or phased adoption strategies to avoid operational disruptions or warranty voidance issues.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Mandatory ethanol percentage disclosure at petrol pumps	Ensures transparency for consumers regarding fuel composition, enabling informed choices and preventing adulteration claims.
Vehicle-wise ethanol compatibility database	Provides data on E20 suitability across vehicle models, aiding consumer protection and reducing engine damage risks.

Feature	Significance
Independent expert committee for E20 compatibility assessment	Offers evidence-based evaluation of real-world performance, environmental impact, and economic viability of ethanol blending.
National consumer disclosure protocol for ethanol-blended petrol	Standardises information dissemination to consumers, aligning with consumer protection norms and reducing information asymmetry.
Time-bound transition framework for legacy vehicles	Balances ethanol blending targets with practical constraints of existing vehicle fleets, ensuring a just and feasible rollout.

Significance for India

- Ethanol blending (E20) is a key component of India's biofuel policy aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependence.
- Directly contributes to India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement by lowering carbon intensity of transport fuels.
- Reduces crude oil imports by substituting a portion of petrol with domestically produced ethanol, enhancing energy self-reliance.
- Diversifies India's energy mix, mitigating risks associated with volatile global oil markets and geopolitical uncertainties.
- Mandatory labelling and disclosure protocols empower consumers to make informed decisions regarding fuel quality and vehicle compatibility.

Challenges

- **Vehicle Compatibility and Safety Risks** — Existing vehicle fleets, particularly older models, may not be designed to handle higher ethanol blends (e.g., E20), leading to engine corrosion, performance degradation, or warranty voidance.
- **Ethanol Production and Supply Chain Bottlenecks** — Dependence on sugarcane and food grains for ethanol production raises concerns about food security and diversion of agricultural resources.
- **Environmental Trade-offs and Net Impact** — Ethanol production, particularly from food grains, can lead to increased water consumption, soil degradation, and indirect land-use change (ILUC), offsetting some environmental benefits.
- **Consumer Awareness and Market Distortions** — Low public awareness about ethanol-blended fuels may lead to misinformation, resistance to adoption, or misuse of fuels in incompatible vehicles.

Way Forward

- Constitute the independent expert committee as sought in the petition, with representation from automobile engineers, petroleum ministry, and Bureau of Indian Standards, to assess real-world E20 compatibility and submit a public report within six months.
- Develop a national, searchable database of vehicle-wise ethanol compatibility, updated annually, in collaboration with automobile manufacturers and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

- Formulate a transparent transition framework for legacy vehicles, including phased availability of lower ethanol blends (e.g., E10) where E20 is incompatible, with clear timelines and public consultation.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for ethanol labelling at petrol pumps, including regular audits, penalties for non-compliance, and consumer grievance redressal systems under the Central Consumer Protection Authority.

Relevance for Prelims

Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP), E20, Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), National Biofuel Policy 2018, Fuel Compatibility, Tail-pipe Emissions, Food-Security Concerns

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding ethanol blending in petrol in India: 1. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) sets the technical standards for ethanol-blended petrol. 2. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) is mandated to frame consumer disclosure protocols for ethanol-blended fuels. 3. The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to mandate ethanol labels on every petrol pump nozzle. 4. The ethanol blending policy in India mandates a minimum of 20% ethanol (E20) in all petrol sold. 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 2 are correct as BIS sets standards and CCPA is tasked with consumer disclosure protocols. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Supreme Court is hearing a plea for mandatory labelling, not directed it. Statement 4 is incorrect as E20 is a target for 2025-26, not a mandatory requirement yet.

Q2. Assertion (A): The ethanol blending policy in India aims to reduce import dependence on crude oil and enhance energy security. Reason (R): Ethanol is a biofuel produced primarily from sugarcane molasses and agricultural residues, which are renewable resources. 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 and reason are correct. Ethanol blending reduces crude oil imports (A) and ethanol is derived from renewable agricultural sources (R). The reason correctly explains the assertion as the renewable nature of ethanol underpins the energy security argument.

Mains practice question

The Supreme Court is currently seized of a public interest litigation seeking mandatory and uniform labelling of ethanol content in petrol at dispensing nozzles, along with a vehicle-wise compatibility database for ethanol-blended fuels. Critically examine the legal, technical, and policy dimensions of ethanol blending in India with reference to the need for consumer protection, environmental sustainability, and energy security. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Legal and Regulatory Framework:
• Cite the National Biofuel Policy (2018) and its amendment (2022) setting ethanol blending targets (E10, E15, E20).
• Reference Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) specifications for ethanol-blended petrol (IS 17021:2020).
• Highlight the role of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) in framing consumer disclosure protocols.
• …

POLITY Delimitation and Women’s Reservation: Constitutional Imperatives, Procedural Steps, and Governance Implications

Mind map: Delimitation and Women’s Reservation: Constitutional Imp

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance (Constitutional Amendments, Representation of People’s Act) • GS Paper III — Social Justice (Women Empowerment, Reservation Policies)

✎ *The Women's Reservation Bill requires a constitutional amendment to Article 81 (increasing Lok Sabha seats) and the completion of the delimitation process post-2026, as the current freeze on...*

PRELIMS POINTER

The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 froze the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats until after the first census post-2000, which was later extended by the 84th Amendment Act of 2001 and further by the 87th Amendment Act of 2003...

Why is this in news?

The statement by the Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Kiren Rijiju, regarding the potential reconvening of Parliament and the impending focus on the delimitation bill has brought the Women's Reservation Bill and the broader process of delimitation into the national discourse. This development underscores the procedural and constitutional complexities involved in implementing the Women's Reservation Act, particularly in the context of the proposed increase in Lok Sabha seats and the associated delimitation exercise. The remarks also highlight the procedural ambiguity surrounding the prorogation of the monsoon session and the political sensitivities surrounding the timing and method of introducing the bill.

Key Points

- The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 froze the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats until after the first census post-2000, which was later extended by the 84th Amendment Act of 2001 and further by the 87th Amendment Act of 2003 to post-2026.
- The delimitation process, governed by the Delimitation Act, 2002, is constitutionally mandated under Article 82 and is

conducted by a Delimitation Commission appointed by the President.

- The proposed increase in Lok Sabha seats (a 50% increase) requires a constitutional amendment to Article 81, which fixes the maximum number of seats in the Lok Sabha.
- The prorogation of the monsoon session of Parliament, which concluded on August 13, 2026, remains pending, raising procedural questions about the timing of a special session.

What is Delimitation and How Does It Relate to Women's Reservation?

- Delimitation is the process of redrawing the boundaries of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies based on the latest census data to ensure equitable representation. It is mandated by Article 82 of the Constitution and conducted under the Delimitation Act.
- The current freeze on delimitation, imposed by the 84th and 87th Amendments, ensures that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies remains unchanged until after the first census post-2026. This freeze was intended to prevent frequent changes that could disrupt political representation.
- The Delimitation Commission, appointed by the President, is a statutory body comprising the Election Commissioner of India, the State Election Commissioner, and a retired Supreme Court judge. Its decisions are final and cannot be challenged in any court.
- The process of delimitation involves multiple stages: (i) identification of population data from the latest census, (ii) determination of seat allocation among states based on

population, (iii) redrawing of constituency boundaries, and (iv) public consultations and objections before finalization.
- The implementation of women's reservation is contingent on the completion of the delimitation process and the subsequent constitutional amendment to increase Lok Sabha seats.
- The political and administrative challenges in delimitation include ensuring fair representation for all communities, addressing regional disparities, and managing the logistical complexities of redrawing over 500 parliamentary constituencies.

Value addition

Feature	**Significance**
Women's Reservation Law (103rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019)	Provides for 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, with implementation deferred to 2029.
Delimitation Process	Redrawing of electoral boundaries to reflect population changes, governed by Articles 82 and 170 of the Constitution.
Parliamentary Session Reconvening	Constitutional provision under Article 85(1) allowing the President to summon Parliament for a session after prorogation.
All-Party Meeting	Constitutional convention for consensus-building on critical legislative proposals, as envisaged under Article 75(3) and parliamentary practices.
Lok Sabha Seat Increase (50%)	Proposal to expand Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 811, necessitating delimitation and potential reallocation of seats among states.

Significance for India

- The Women's Reservation Law remains unimplemented due to its deferred enforcement clause, necessitating parliamentary action for its activation.
- Delimitation is a constitutional process (Articles 82, 170) that must adhere to the principle of 'one person, one vote' while balancing federal equity.
- The proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats by 50% could alter the political arithmetic, necessitating consensus among states to prevent disproportionate representation.
- An all-party meeting serves as a democratic safeguard to ensure legislative proposals are debated without procedural haste, aligning with parliamentary conventions.
- Delimitation requires coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and state governments, as the ECI is the authority under Article 324.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Delimitation Commission in India: 1. The Delimitation Commission is a statutory body established under the Delimitation Act, 2002. 2. The Commission is tasked with the delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. 3. The orders of the Delimitation Commission cannot be challenged in any court of law. 4. The Commission is headed by the Chief Election Commissioner of India. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

4. All

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 2 are correct. The Delimitation Commission is indeed a statutory body under the Delimitation Act, 2002, and is responsible for delimiting constituencies. Statement 3 is incorrect as the orders of the Delimitation Commission can be challenged in the Supreme Court. Statement 4 is incorrect as the Commission is headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, not the Chief Election Commissioner.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Women's Reservation Bill, once enacted, will reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. Reason (R): The Bill amends Articles 82 and 330 of the Constitution to provide for such reservation. 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

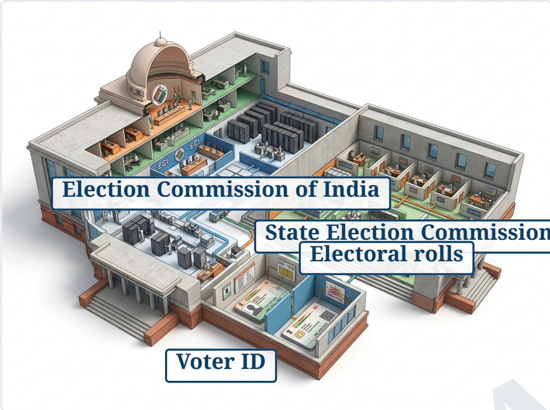
Answer: Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A — The Women's Reservation Bill aims to reserve one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The Bill does amend Articles 82 and 330 of the Constitution to provide for this reservation. Thus, both the assertion and reason are true, and the reason correctly explains the assertion.

Mains practice question

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, seeks to implement women's reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. In this context, critically examine the constitutional and procedural challenges associated with the delimitation exercise required for its implementation. Also, discuss the implications of such reservation on federalism and political representation in India. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework:
• Article 82 (Delimitation of constituencies) and Article 330 (Reservation for SCs/STs) as amended by the Bill.
• Role of the Delimitation Commission under the Delimitation Act, 2002.
• Reference to the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023 (Women's Reservation Act).
2. Procedural Challenges:
• Timeline for delimitation: ...

POLITY Constitutional and Institutional Framework Governing Electoral Rolls: Separation of Voters’ Lists for Parliament, State Legislatures, and Local Bodies



3D cutaway: मुख्य चुनाव आयुक्त

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Statutory Bodies (Election Commission of India)

Why is this in news?

> **REMEMBER**
> The preparation of electoral rolls for Parliament/State Legislatures and local bodies (Panchayats/Municipalities) is constitutionally separated under Articles 243K and 243ZA, respectively, and cannot be unified without...

The Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar, clarified on 24 August 2026 that conducting Assembly, Panchayat, and Municipal elections using a single unified voter list is constitutionally and legally infeasible under the existing framework. This statement underscores the institutional and constitutional separation between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs), as well as the distinct legal provisions governing different tiers of elections.

Key Points

- The Election Commission of India (ECI), established under Article 324 of the Constitution, is responsible for conducting elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures.
- Article 243K of the Constitution empowers SECs to prepare electoral rolls for Panchayat elections, while Article 243ZA empowers them for Municipal elections, distinct from the rolls prepared by the ECI for general elections.
- The ECI maintains a single electoral roll for Parliament and State Legislative Assembly elections, while SECs maintain separate rolls for local body elections.
- The 74th Amendment Act, 1992, was enacted to strengthen decentralised governance and ensure autonomy to local bodies in electoral matters.
- The ECI has consistently maintained that the preparation and revision of electoral rolls for different tiers of elections are governed by separate constitutional and statutory provisions.

What is the Constitutional and Institutional Framework Governing Electoral Rolls in India?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI), a constitutional body under Article 324, is responsible for the preparation of electoral rolls for elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures.
- Article 243K empowers SECs to superintend, direct, and control the preparation of electoral rolls for Panchayat elections, while Article 243ZA does so for Municipal elections.
- The ECI and SECs function independently; the ECI does not have jurisdiction over the electoral rolls prepared by SECs for local body elections.

- The electoral rolls prepared by the ECI and SECs are distinct and cannot be merged or unified without a constitutional amendment or legislative intervention.
- The ECI maintains a single electoral roll for Parliament and State Legislative Assembly elections, while SECs maintain separate rolls for local body elections, ensuring administrative and constitutional autonomy.
- The Chief Election Commissioner clarified that the ECI cannot unify electoral rolls for different tiers of elections due to the constitutional separation of powers between the ECI and SECs.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Constitutional division of electoral jurisdictions	The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 mandates separate State Election Commissions for conducting panchayat and municipal elections, precluding a single voter list for all tiers of elections.
Annual revision of electoral rolls	Approximately 8–10% of the 97 crore electors undergo changes annually due to demographic shifts, necessitating dynamic voter list management.
Voter ID—Aadhaar linkage prohibition	The Election Commission clarified that Aadhaar cannot be linked to Voter IDs as Aadhaar does not serve as proof of age, domicile, or citizenship.
Elector participation dynamics	Annual additions include 4 crore new voters, while 2 crore deaths and 4 crore internal migrations require continuous roll updates.
Institutional credibility and	

Feature	Significance
transparency mechanisms	The ECI employs digital platforms (ECL-2, ECINET) and voter literacy initiatives to maintain electoral integrity and public trust.

Significance for India

- The constitutional framework under the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, ensures federal autonomy in local governance by vesting the power to prepare electoral rolls for panchayats and municipalities exclusively with State Election Commissions, independent of the Election Commission of India.
- The annual revision of electoral rolls reflects the administrative challenge of maintaining accurate voter lists amid high demographic mobility, underscoring the need for robust data management systems.
- The prohibition on linking Aadhaar to Voter IDs reinforces the principle of electoral autonomy, as Aadhaar lacks the constitutional prerequisites for voter eligibility (age, citizenship, domicile).
- The deployment of digital platforms like ECL-2 and ECINET exemplifies the Election Commission's efforts to modernise electoral processes, enhance transparency, and facilitate youth engagement in democratic participation.

Challenges

- **Maintaining Electoral Roll Accuracy** — High annual turnover of electors (8–10%) due to births, deaths, migrations, and new voter registrations necessitates continuous and efficient updating of electoral rolls.

- **Institutional Credibility and Public Trust** — Addressing misinformation and baseless allegations against the Election Commission without eroding public confidence in the electoral process.
- **Integration of Digital Governance Tools** — Scaling up digital platforms (ECL-2, ECINET) to accommodate nationwide voter education and participation, particularly among youth.
- **Constitutional and Legal Constraints on Electoral Reforms** — The requirement for parliamentary approval to unify electoral rolls across different tiers (e.g., 'One Nation, One Election') highlights the procedural and constitutional hurdles in electoral reform.

Relevance for Prelims

Electoral Rolls, Voter ID, NOTA, 73rd Amendment Act, Article 243K, Article 243ZA, Chief Election Commissioner, State Election Commissions, One Nation One Election

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the conduct of elections in India: 1. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for preparing electoral rolls for both parliamentary and state legislative assembly elections. 2. The State Election Commissions, established under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, prepare electoral rolls for panchayat and municipal elections. 3. The linkage of Voter ID with Aadhaar is mandatory as per the Representation of the People Act, 1950. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one
2. Only two

3. All three
4. None

Answer: All three — Statement 1 is correct: The ECI prepares electoral rolls for parliamentary and state legislative assembly elections. Statement 2 is correct: State Election Commissions, under the 73rd Amendment, prepare electoral rolls for panchayat and municipal elections. Statement 3 is incorrect: The linkage of Voter ID with Aadhaar is not mandatory; the ECI has clarified that Aadhaar is not a proof of citizenship or age for voter registration.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Election Commission of India (ECI) can prepare a single electoral roll for conducting Lok Sabha, State Assembly, and Panchayat elections. Reason (R): The Constitution of India empowers the ECI to unify electoral rolls across all tiers of governance under Article 324. 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 false, but R is true. — Assertion (A) is false: The ECI cannot prepare a single electoral roll for all tiers of elections due to constitutional and legal provisions. Reason (R) is true: Article 324 empowers the ECI to superintend, direct, and control elections, but it does not grant the power to unify electoral rolls across different tiers. The 73rd Amendment Act explicitly vests the preparation of electoral rolls for panchayat and municipal elections with State Election Commissions.

Mains practice question

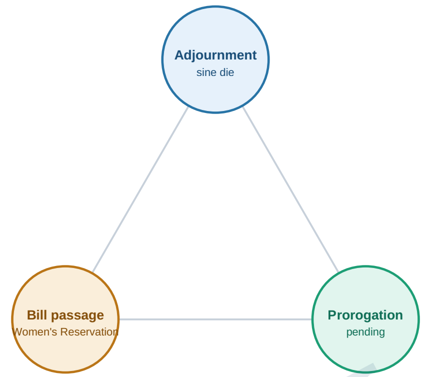
The Constitution of India, through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, established State Election Commissions to conduct panchayat and municipal elections. In this context, critically examine the constitutional and legal framework governing the preparation of electoral rolls in India. Also, elucidate the challenges in unifying electoral rolls across different tiers of governance, citing relevant provisions and recent judicial pronouncements. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Constitutional and Legal Framework (6 points):
• Article 324: Powers and functions of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to superintend, direct, and control elections.
• Article 325: Prohibition of discrimination in electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex.
• Article 326: Universal adult suffrage as the basis for …

POLITY

Constitutional Mechanics of Parliamentary Session Closure: Adjournment, Prorogation and Legislative Timelines in the Monsoon Session 2026

Parliament session closure process



Parliament session closure process

GS Paper II — Polity and Governance (Parliamentary Procedures, Constitutional Provisions)

✎ *Prorogation is the formal closure of a parliamentary session under Article 85, distinct from adjournment sine die, and is conventionally completed within 2–4 days of the latter.*

Why is this in news?

PRELIMS POINTER

The Constitution of India, under Article 85, empowers the President to summon, prorogue, and dissolve Parliament on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.

The Monsoon Session of Parliament 2026 concluded with both Houses adjourned sine die on August 13, 2026, yet formal prorogation remains pending, raising constitutional and procedural questions. This delay has fuelled speculation regarding the government's legislative strategy, particularly concerning a proposed constitutional amendment to implement the Women's Reservation Act, which may require passage before the 2029 general elections. The absence of prorogation within the customary timeframe has prompted constitutional and procedural scrutiny.

Key Points

- The Constitution of India, under Article 85, empowers the President to summon, prorogue, and dissolve Parliament on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.
- Parliamentary sessions in India are typically concluded through prorogation, a formal act that ends a session and all pending business, including bills and notices, unless specifically carried over.
- Adjournment sine die refers to the indefinite suspension of a House's sitting without fixing a date for reassembly, while prorogation formally terminates the session.
- The customary timeline between adjournment sine die and prorogation ranges from 2 to 4 days, though historical precedents, such as in 2015 (28 days) and 2021 (20 days), demonstrate flexibility.
- The Women's Reservation Bill, seeking 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, has been a long-standing legislative priority, with earlier attempts failing due to lack of consensus.
- Delimitation-linked concerns, particularly regarding southern states' representation, have emerged as a critical point of contention in discussions surrounding the Bill.

Constitutional and Procedural Dimensions of Parliamentary Session Closure

- Article 85 of the Constitution of India delineates the President's authority to summon and prorogue Parliament, acting on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers.
- Prorogation is distinct from adjournment: it formally ends a session, thereby lapsing all pending business unless explicitly carried forward, whereas adjournment merely suspends proceedings.
- The term 'sine die' (Latin for 'without a day') denotes an indefinite adjournment, leaving the date of reassembly unspecified until the President issues a summoning notification.
- The delay in prorogation beyond customary timelines does not inherently violate constitutional provisions but may reflect strategic considerations, such as the need to introduce or pass critical legislation.
- Constitutional conventions, though not legally binding, guide the timing of prorogation to ensure legislative continuity and procedural transparency.
- The Women's Reservation Bill, if passed as a constitutional amendment, would require a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament, followed by ratification by at least half of the State Legislatures.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Adjournment sine die	

Feature	Significance
	Temporarily halts parliamentary proceedings without setting a date for resumption, allowing the government flexibility in scheduling future sittings.
Prorogation	Formal termination of a parliamentary session by the President on the government's advice, marking the end of business for that session.
Constitutional convention on prorogation	Ensures continuity of legislative business by providing a structured transition between sessions, typically within 3-4 days of sine die adjournment.
Speculative legislative timing	Delays in prorogation may indicate strategic planning to introduce or pass contentious legislation in a subsequent session without reconvening a new one.
Southern states' representation concerns	Potential demographic shifts due to delimitation may alter the political balance, prompting states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to seek assurances on seat retention.

Significance for India

- Demonstrates the procedural flexibility within parliamentary democracy, where adjournment and prorogation serve as tools for managing legislative timelines.
- Highlights the interplay between constitutional provisions (Article 85) and executive discretion in determining session durations.
- The delay in prorogation suggests potential strategic use of parliamentary procedures to facilitate the passage of constitutionally significant amendments, such as the Women’s Reservation Bill.

- Exemplifies how governments may utilise procedural gaps to navigate legislative challenges, particularly when faced with opposition to contentious bills.
- Raises questions about the balance of power between the Union and states, particularly regarding demographic representation in Parliament.

Challenges

- **Procedural Delays and Legislative Uncertainty** — Prolonged adjournment without prorogation creates ambiguity in the legislative calendar, complicating planning for both the government and opposition.
- **Federal Tensions on Representation** — Potential demographic shifts due to delimitation could exacerbate inter-state tensions, particularly between northern and southern states.
- **Legislative Passage of Contentious Bills** — The Women's Reservation Bill, linked to delimitation, faces opposition due to fears of reduced representation for certain states.
- **Public and Institutional Trust** — Prolonged procedural delays without clear explanations may fuel speculation about hidden agendas, undermining public trust.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the adjournment and prorogation of Parliament in India: 1. Adjournment sine die means the House is adjourned for an indefinite period. 2. Prorogation of a House signifies the termination of its sitting and all pending business lapses. 3. The President of India can prorogue the Houses of Parliament on the advice of the Council of Ministers.

4. A House can be adjourned sine die without being prorogued later. 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 3 are correct. Statement 4 is incorrect because adjournment sine die is followed by prorogation, though the gap may vary.

Q2. Assertion (A): The President of India can summon and prorogue Parliament under Article 85 of the Constitution. Reason (R): The President acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers in matters relating to the summoning and prorogation of Parliament. 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

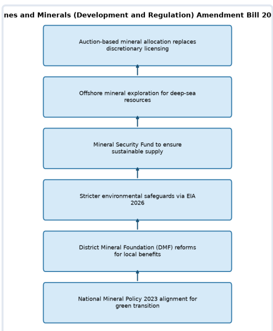
Answer: A — Both A and R are true, and R correctly explains A as per Article 85 of the Constitution.

Mains practice question

The Constitution of India vests the President with the power to prorogue Parliament under Article 85(2)(a). However, in recent times, the prorogation of Parliament has been delayed, raising questions about the executive's discretion and the legislative process. Critically examine the constitutional significance of prorogation and its implications for the passage of legislation. Also, analyse how such delays may impact the functioning of parliamentary democracy in India. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Constitutional Basis:
• Article 85(2)(a) empowers the President to prorogue either House or both Houses.
• Prorogation terminates a session and all pending business lapses, necessitating fresh introduction in the next session.
• The President acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers (Article 74).
2. Purpose and Significance of Prorogation: ...

POLITY Transformative Reforms in Mineral Governance: Analysing the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026



Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill 2026

GS Paper II — Governance, Transparency and Accountability • GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment • GS Paper III — Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways and Human Resources

Why is this in news?

REMEMBER
The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, aims to transform India's mineral sector through auction-based allocation, offshore exploration, a Mineral Security Fund, and stringent…

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha on 10 August 2026, represents a legislative endeavour to modernise India's mineral sector governance. It seeks to address structural inefficiencies in mineral allocation, enhance transparency through auction-based mechanisms, integrate robust environmental safeguards, and establish a Mineral Security Fund to ensure sustainable and strategic mineral development. The Bill is framed against the backdrop of global supply chain vulnerabilities, escalating demand for critical minerals essential for clean energy technologies and defence applications, and India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions and Atmanirbhar Bharat objectives.

Key Points

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act), has governed India's mineral sector for over six decades, but its provisions have become increasingly inadequate in addressing contemporary economic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges.
- The National Mineral Policy, 2019, recommended comprehensive reforms to streamline mineral governance,

including auction-based allocation of mineral concessions, enhanced local value addition, and integration of environmental and social considerations in mineral development.

- India's mineral sector contributes approximately 1.5% to the national GDP but possesses significant untapped potential, particularly in critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements, and graphite, which are vital for clean energy technologies, electric mobility, and defence applications.
- The global transition towards green energy and digital technologies has intensified demand for critical minerals, necessitating strategic interventions to secure supply chains and reduce import dependence.
- Recent judicial interventions, including the Supreme Court's observations in 2020 on the need for transparent and sustainable mineral governance, have underscored the urgency of legislative reforms in the sector.
- India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement further necessitate reforms that align mineral development with environmental sustainability and social equity.

What is the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026?

- The Bill proposes to amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, to introduce auction-based allocation of mineral concessions as the primary mechanism for granting mineral rights, replacing the erstwhile discretionary allocation system.

- It seeks to enable offshore mineral exploration and mining within India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf, thereby expanding the scope of mineral resources available for exploitation.
- The Bill introduces a Mineral Security Fund to finance research, exploration, technology adoption, and sustainable mining practices, with a focus on critical minerals essential for India's industrialisation and energy transition.
- It aims to promote domestic value addition in mineral processing and manufacturing, thereby enhancing employment generation and reducing import dependence in critical mineral supply chains.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Auction-based mineral allocation	Replaces discretionary allocation with transparent, competitive bidding to curb malpractices and align with global best practices in mineral governance.
Offshore mineral exploration	Expands India's mineral resource base by permitting exploration in Exclusive Economic Zones, reducing import dependence on critical minerals.
Environmental safeguards integration	Mandates Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and sustainable mining practices, aligning with SDG 12 and India's climate commitments.
Mineral Security Fund	Establishes a dedicated corpus to finance R&D, exploration, and technology adoption in critical minerals, ensuring long-term supply chain resilience.

Feature	Significance
District Mineral Foundation (DMF) reforms	Strengthens local benefit-sharing mechanisms to address socio-economic impacts of mining, ensuring equitable development in mineral-rich districts.

Significance for India

- Enhances transparency and efficiency in mineral allocation, reducing rent-seeking and improving ease of doing business in the mining sector.
- Supports domestic value addition in critical minerals, reducing import dependency and boosting Make-in-India initiatives in green energy and defence manufacturing.
- Reduces vulnerabilities in critical mineral supply chains, which are essential for defence production, space technology, and clean energy infrastructure.
- Promotes offshore exploration to diversify resource access, mitigating geopolitical risks in mineral imports.
- Integrates environmental safeguards into mining governance, ensuring compliance with EIA 2006 and reducing ecological degradation.

Challenges

- **Regulatory and Implementation Bottlenecks** — Complexity in harmonising central and state regulations due to the concurrent nature of mineral governance under the Constitution.

- **Environmental and Social Resistance** — Opposition from local communities and environmental groups over land acquisition and ecological degradation concerns.
- **Technological and Infrastructure Gaps** — Limited domestic expertise in offshore mineral exploration and advanced mining technologies, necessitating foreign collaborations.
- **Economic Viability and Market Dynamics** — Volatility in global mineral prices affecting the profitability of domestic mining operations and investor interest.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026: 1. The Bill introduces auction-based allocation for mineral concessions. 2. It establishes a Mineral Security Fund to ensure sustainable mineral governance. 3. The Bill mandates offshore mineral exploration in India's exclusive economic zone. 4. The Bill replaces the National Mineral Policy, 2019, with a new policy framework. 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 amends the existing MMDR Act, 1957, and does not replace the National Mineral Policy, 2019.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, aims to promote domestic value addition in critical minerals. Reason (R): The Bill seeks to integrate environmental safeguards and strategic mineral governance to support India's industrialisation and energy transition. 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. The Bill explicitly aims to promote domestic value addition in critical minerals (A) to support industrialisation and energy transition. Reason (R) correctly explains this aim by linking it to environmental safeguards and strategic governance.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the significance of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, in transforming India's mineral governance framework. Analyse its provisions for auction-based allocation, offshore exploration, and the Mineral Security Fund, while evaluating their implications for transparency, sustainability, and strategic autonomy. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks)
• Context: India's mineral sector under MMDR Act, 1957; outdated provisions in light of green energy transition and critical mineral demand.
• Objective of the Bill: Reform mineral governance through transparency, sustainability, and strategic autonomy.
2. Auction-based Allocation (3 marks)
• Provision: Mandates auction-based allocation of mineral concessions (Section …

POLITY Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Key Amendments and Their Implications for Direct Taxation and Capital Markets

Mind map: Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Key Amen

GS Paper III — Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

> ✎ *The Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, introduces tax exemptions for foreign investors in government securities, and extends fiscal incentives for diamond and electronics manufacturing...*

Why is this in news?

The Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 4, 2026, and passed by both Houses of Parliament by August 10, 2026, seeks to

PRELIMS POINTER

The Income-tax Act, 1961, is the primary legislation governing direct taxation in India, including provisions for taxing income from capital gains, interest, and business operations.

replace the Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, issued on June 5, 2026. The Bill introduces significant amendments to the Income-tax Act, 2025, the Finance Act, 2026, and the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, with a focus on providing tax exemptions to foreign investors, specific industries, and investment funds. These amendments aim to enhance India's attractiveness as an investment destination while addressing structural gaps in the taxation framework.

Key Points

- The Income-tax Act, 1961, is the primary legislation governing direct taxation in India, including provisions for taxing income from capital gains, interest, and business operations.
- The Ordinance route was utilised to expedite amendments, reflecting the government's intent to address investor concerns promptly.
- Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) have historically faced taxation on income from government securities, which has been a point of discussion in the context of India's capital market reforms.
- The diamond and electronics manufacturing sectors are critical to India's export-oriented growth strategy, necessitating targeted fiscal incentives.
- Investment funds registered outside India but managed from India have faced compliance challenges under existing tax provisions, impacting their operational flexibility.
- Business trusts and special purpose vehicles (SPVs) are increasingly used in infrastructure financing, requiring clarity on tax treatment to ensure investor confidence.

What is the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026?

- The Bill is a legislative measure aimed at amending the Income-tax Act, 2025, the Finance Act, 2026, and the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, to introduce tax exemptions and procedural relaxations.
- It replaces the Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, issued on June 5, 2026, thereby converting temporary executive actions into permanent legislative provisions.
- The Bill introduces exemptions for foreign investors, including Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), from income tax on interest and capital gains arising from investments in government securities, effective April 1, 2026.
- Tax exemptions are provided for foreign companies engaged in diamond mining, sightholder activities, and related brokerage or auction services, as well as for storage of electronic components in custom bonded warehouses, effective October 1, 2026, and valid until March 31, 2041.
- The Bill extends existing tax exemptions for foreign companies supplying capital goods, equipment, or tooling to contract manufacturers of electronic goods until the financial year 2040-41.
- Amendments to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, are proposed to align with the broader taxation reforms, though specific details are not provided in the Bill's summary.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Repeal and replacement of Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026	Provides legislative permanence to temporary tax exemptions introduced via ordinance, ensuring legal certainty and compliance stability for stakeholders.
Exemption to FIIs and BIS on income from government securities	Enhances attractiveness of Indian government securities for foreign investors, potentially increasing capital inflows and reducing borrowing costs for the sovereign.
Tax exemption for foreign companies in diamond and electronics manufacturing	Aims to incentivise foreign investment in critical sectors, aligning with 'Make in India' objectives while addressing supply-chain vulnerabilities in electronics.
Relaxation of conditions for investment funds managed from India	Reduces regulatory burden on global funds operating from India, potentially positioning the country as a more competitive fund management hub.
Extension of capital goods exemption for electronic goods contract manufacturers	Provides long-term tax stability to contract manufacturers, encouraging sustained investment in high-technology manufacturing ecosystems.

Significance for India

- Aligns with the Union Budget’s objective of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) by reducing tax barriers for specific investor classes and sectors.

- Demonstrates the government's use of tax policy as a tool for sectoral development, particularly in capital-intensive industries like electronics and diamonds.
- Enhances the appeal of Indian government securities to foreign institutional investors (FIIs), which is critical for financing fiscal deficits and managing public debt sustainably.
- The inclusion of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) under the exemption framework underscores India's engagement with international financial institutions, potentially improving access to global liquidity.
- The exemptions for diamond and electronics sectors are designed to integrate India into global value chains, particularly in high-value segments like rough diamond trading and electronics assembly.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026: 1. The Bill exempts Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) from paying income tax on capital gains arising from the sale of government securities. 2. The exemption applies to income arising on or after April 1, 2026. 3. The Bill amends the Finance Act, 2026 to introduce a 10% surcharge on income-tax payable by domestic companies opting for concessional tax regimes. 4. The Bill provides tax exemptions to foreign companies engaged in diamond mining and manufacturing of electronic goods in notified special zones. 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 amends the Income-tax Act, 2025 and the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, but does not introduce a 10% surcharge on domestic companies in the Finance Act, 2026.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to repeal and replace the Income-tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026. Reason (R): The Ordinance provided exemptions to certain foreign investors in government securities, which the Bill further extends to other entities. 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 statements are true. The Bill does repeal and replace the Ordinance, and the Ordinance's exemptions are extended by the Bill. However, the Bill's amendments are broader and not solely an extension of the Ordinance's provisions.

Mains practice question

The Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 introduces significant amendments to the Income-tax Act, 2025, aimed at attracting foreign investment and promoting specific sectors. Critically examine the rationale behind these tax exemptions and their potential implications for India's fiscal policy and economic governance. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction: Briefly contextualise the Bill within India's broader tax reform agenda and the need for foreign capital inflows.
2. Key Provisions:
• Exemptions for FIIs and BIS on income from government securities (Section 10(46) of Income-tax Act, 2025).
• Tax exemptions for foreign companies in diamond mining and electronics manufacturing in notified …

POLITY The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026: Modernising Legal Provisions for Digital Banking Records in India

Mind map: The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026: Modernising Lega

GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment • GS Paper III — Role of External State and Non-State Actors in Creating Challenges to Internal Security

Why is this in news?

The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026 was introduced in

REMEMBER
The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026 modernises the 1891 Act by explicitly recognising electronic records as admissible evidence in

courts, subject to safeguards against tampering, while retaining existing provisions…

the Lok Sabha on August 3, 2026, and subsequently passed by both Houses of Parliament by August 10, 2026. The Bill seeks to repeal and replace the colonial-era Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, to align the legal framework governing the admissibility and production of bank records in judicial proceedings with contemporary banking practices, particularly the increasing reliance on digital records. This legislative update is significant for aspirants as it intersects with themes of digital governance, financial sector regulation, and the evidentiary standards in legal proceedings.

Key Points

- The Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, was enacted during the British colonial period to provide a legal framework for the admissibility of bank records as evidence in courts. It was designed primarily for physical ledgers and paper-based transactions, which were the norm at the time.
- The Act enabled certified copies of entries in bankers' books to be admitted as evidence without the need to produce the original records, thereby facilitating judicial proceedings and reducing administrative burdens on banks.
- With the rapid digitisation of banking operations in India, the existing legal provisions have become outdated, as they do not explicitly recognise electronic or digital records as admissible evidence.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other financial regulators have progressively encouraged the adoption of digital banking, necessitating a legal framework that accommodates electronic records while ensuring their integrity and authenticity.

- The Bill aims to address gaps in the 1891 Act by explicitly recognising electronic records as legally valid evidence, subject to safeguards against tampering and unauthorised alterations.
- The Bill also seeks to extend the applicability of its provisions to a broader range of financial entities, reflecting the diversification of India’s financial sector beyond traditional banking.

What is the Bankers’ Books Evidence Bill, 2026?

- The Bill proposes to repeal and replace the Bankers’ Books Evidence Act, 1891, to modernise the legal framework governing the admissibility and production of bank records in judicial proceedings.
- A key provision of the Bill is the explicit recognition of electronic or digital records of bankers’ books as admissible, valid, and legally enforceable evidence in legal proceedings, subject to conditions ensuring their authenticity and integrity.
- The Bill retains the existing safeguards under the 1891 Act, such as the requirement for certified copies of records and the prohibition on compelling bank officers to produce records or appear as witnesses unless ordered by a court for a 'special cause'.
- The term 'special cause' is defined to include scenarios where the accuracy or genuineness of entries is doubtful, the regularity of record-keeping is interrupted, or the bank fails to comply with court orders regarding inspection.
- The Bill retains the applicability of its provisions to traditional banking entities and post office savings banks, while also empowering the central government to extend these

provisions to other financial sector entities through notification.
- The government may specify conditions, exceptions, or modifications when extending the Bill’s provisions to other financial entities, ensuring flexibility in implementation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Admissibility of electronic records	Modernises legal evidence framework by explicitly recognising digital bank records as valid evidence, aligning with contemporary banking practices and reducing reliance on physical ledgers.
Conditions for admissibility (integrity checks)	Ensures authenticity through requirements such as true copies, absence of unauthorised changes, and system integrity, thereby maintaining evidentiary reliability.
Retention of Court-ordered production of books	Preserves judicial oversight by requiring a 'special cause' order for compelling banks to produce records or testify, balancing investigative needs with bank confidentiality.
Definition of 'special cause'	Clarifies circumstances warranting judicial intervention, including doubts about record accuracy, irregularities in record-keeping, or non-compliance with court orders.
Extension to broader financial sector	Empowers the central government to extend the Act’s provisions to non-banking financial entities via notification, ensuring regulatory consistency across financial institutions.

Significance for India

- Strengthens the evidentiary framework for financial disputes by accommodating digital records, reducing procedural delays and enhancing judicial efficiency.
- Maintains judicial safeguards to prevent arbitrary disclosure of bank records, preserving the principle of proportionality in legal proceedings.
- Facilitates the integration of digital banking records into legal processes, supporting the growth of digital financial services and fintech innovations.
- Enhances trust in financial institutions by ensuring that electronic records are treated with the same legal weight as physical documents.
- Aligns India’s legal framework with global standards for digital evidence, such as those under the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Bankers’ Books Evidence Act, 1891 and the Bankers’ Books Evidence Bill, 2026: 1. The Bankers’ Books Evidence Act, 1891, allows certified copies of bank records to be used as evidence in legal proceedings without requiring the production of the original records. 2. The Bankers’ Books Evidence Bill, 2026, seeks to repeal the 1891 Act and introduce provisions for the admissibility of electronic records as evidence. 3. Under the 1891 Act, an officer of a bank cannot be compelled to produce bankers’ books in a legal proceeding unless the bank is a party to the proceeding. 4. The Bill, 2026, empowers the central government to extend its provisions to any entity in the financial sector by notification. 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 incorrect as the 1891 Act allows compelling production of bankers' books under specific court orders, not merely if the bank is a party.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, introduces provisions for the admissibility of electronic records as evidence in legal proceedings. Reason (R): The Bill aims to modernise the legal framework to align with contemporary banking practices and technological advancements.

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 as the Bill explicitly includes electronic records to reflect modern banking systems.

Mains practice question

The Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, has been a cornerstone of evidentiary standards in banking disputes for over a century. The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, seeks to modernise this framework by introducing provisions for electronic records and expanding its applicability. Critically examine the necessity and implications of these reforms in the context of contemporary legal and technological developments. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks): Briefly outline the Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891, its purpose, and its limitations in the digital age. Mention the key objectives of the Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026.
2. Necessity of Reform (4 marks):
• Technological Advancements: Explain how digital banking and electronic records have become ubiquitous, necessitating legal …

POLITY Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act, 1996: Strengthening Tribal Self-Governance Through Gram Sabha Empowerment

PESA Implementation Flow

Fifth Schedule Areas	Notified by President
PESA Act 1996	Extends Part IX with modifications
Gram Sabha	Foundational institution
Decision-Making Authority	Land, resources, development
Implementation Challenges	Awareness, capacity, enforcement
Jurisdictional Conflicts	Forest Rights, Land Acquisition Acts

PESA Implementation Flow

GS Paper II — Constitutional and Non-Constitutional Bodies (Role and Functions of Gram Sabha in Scheduled Areas) • GS Paper II — Governance, Transparency and Accountability (Implementation Challenges of PESA in Tribal Areas) • GS Paper III — Environment and Forest Conservation (Minor Forest Produce and Tribal Livelihoods under PESA)

> ✎ *The Gram Sabha, as the foundational institution under PESA, must be empowered through mandatory orientation programmes, local-language awareness campaigns, and digitisation of its resolutions to...*

Why is this in news?

The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, chaired by Mr. Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, submitted its report on July 31, 2026, reviewing the implementation of the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996. The report underscores critical gaps in the operationalisation of Gram Sabha powers, illegal land transfers, and inadequate village-centric planning, highlighting systemic reforms needed to strengthen tribal self-governance and protect land rights in scheduled areas.

PRELIMS POINTER

The Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, extends Part IX of the Constitution to the Fifth Schedule areas with modifications to accommodate tribal autonomy.

Key Points

- The Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, extends Part IX of the Constitution to the Fifth Schedule areas with modifications to accommodate tribal autonomy.

- Scheduled Areas are notified by the President under the Fifth Schedule, characterised by a preponderance of tribal population and socio-economic backwardness.
- The Act grants Gram Sabha extensive powers over community resources, customary dispute resolution, minor forest produce, land acquisition, and village development planning.
- Despite constitutional provisions, the operationalisation of PESA has been uneven, with Gram Sabha powers often remaining on paper due to administrative and institutional constraints.
- The Forest Rights Act, 2006, and the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, intersect with PESA, creating overlapping jurisdictions and implementation challenges.
- The Fifth Schedule empowers the Governor of a state to make regulations for the peace and good governance of Scheduled Areas, including the protection of tribal rights.

What is the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996?

- The PESA Act, 1996, is a constitutional extension of Part IX (Panchayats) to the Fifth Schedule areas, ensuring tribal self-governance by empowering Gram Sabhas.
- It mandates that Gram Sabhas must be consulted before any land acquisition, resettlement, or development projects in Scheduled Areas.
- The Act recognises the right of Gram Sabhas to manage minor forest produce, resolve local disputes through customary practices, and plan village-level development.

- PESA overrides conflicting provisions in state Panchayat Acts, ensuring that tribal customs and traditions are respected in governance.
- The Act requires states to frame rules for its implementation, including the composition and functions of Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas.
- PESA is a critical legal instrument for protecting tribal rights, preventing alienation of tribal lands, and ensuring inclusive development.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Constitutional Extension of Part IX to Fifth Schedule Areas	Extends democratic decentralisation to tribal regions, ensuring constitutional recognition of local self-governance in Scheduled Areas.
Gram Sabha as the Foundational Institution	Empowers tribal communities to exercise decision-making authority over land, resources, and local development, aligning with customary practices.
Village Planning and GPDP Mandate	Requires Gram Sabhas to prepare and approve Village Plans for development, ensuring tribal priorities are integrated into planning processes.
Land Protection Provisions	Prohibits alienation of tribal land without Gram Sabha consent, addressing historical injustices and protecting customary land rights.
Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanism	Recognises traditional dispute resolution systems within Gram Sabhas, fostering social harmony and reducing reliance on formal judicial systems.

Feature	Significance
Minor Forest Produce Management	Grants Gram Sabhas authority over minor forest produce, enhancing livelihood security and promoting sustainable resource utilisation.

Significance for India

- Strengthens democratic decentralisation by vesting authority in Gram Sabhas, aligning with the constitutional vision of local self-governance.
- Enhances participatory democracy by ensuring tribal communities have a decisive role in governance and development decisions.
- Safeguards tribal land rights by preventing illegal alienation, addressing historical injustices and displacement.
- Recognises customary practices and traditional knowledge systems, ensuring cultural preservation and community autonomy.
- Encourages sustainable resource management by empowering Gram Sabhas to regulate access to minor forest produce and forest lands.

Challenges

- **Operationalisation of Gram Sabha Powers** — Gram Sabha powers remain largely symbolic due to lack of awareness, administrative apathy, and institutional constraints.
- **Illegal Land Transfers and Alienation** — Historical land alienation persists due to weak enforcement of PESA provisions and collusion with vested interests.

- **Overlapping Jurisdictions and Policy Gaps** — Intersection with laws like the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and Land Acquisition Act, 2013, creates jurisdictional conflicts and implementation challenges.
- **Inadequate Village-Centric Planning** — Gram Sabhas often lack technical and financial resources to prepare Village Plans for Development (GPDP).

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996: 1. PESA extends Part IX of the Constitution to the Fifth Schedule areas with modifications. 2. Gram Sabha is empowered to manage minor forest produce and resolve customary disputes under PESA. 3. The Act mandates that all land transfers in Scheduled Areas must be approved by the State Legislature. 4. Village Planning and Development (GPDP) is a statutory requirement under PESA. 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 because PESA does not mandate approval by the State Legislature for all land transfers; it primarily protects tribal land from alienation through Gram Sabha consent.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Gram Sabha under the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, has the power to regulate minor forest produce collection. Reason (R): The Forest

Rights Act, 2006, explicitly overrides the powers of the Gram Sabha in matters related to forest rights and minor forest produce.

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 — The Gram Sabha under PESA does have powers to regulate minor forest produce, but the Forest Rights Act, 2006, does not override these powers; instead, it supplements them by recognizing individual and community forest rights.

Mains practice question

The Gram Sabha, as the foundational institution under the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996, remains underutilised despite its constitutional empowerment. Critically examine the structural, administrative, and legal challenges inhibiting its effective operationalisation in Scheduled Areas. Also, outline the key recommendations of the Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (2026) to address these gaps. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Constitutional and Statutory Framework of PESA (2 marks):
• Brief on PESA’s extension of Part IX to Fifth Schedule areas with modifications.
• Key provisions: Section 4(d) (land acquisition approval), Section 4(g) (minor forest produce), Section 4(i) (customary disputes), Section 4(j) (village development planning).
• Role of Gram Sabha as the primary …

POLITY Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026: Institutionalising Integrity in Competitive Examinations

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GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution and Polity (Parliamentary processes, electoral reforms) • GS Paper III — Security Challenges and their Management (Cyber threats, organised crime)

Why is this in news?

REMEMBER

The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduces stringent penal provisions (5–10 years imprisonment and fines up to ₹10 crore) and empowers states to set up fast-track courts to…

The Parliament has passed the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, which seeks to strengthen the legal framework against paper leaks and other malpractices in public examinations. This legislative intervention follows recurring instances of exam-related malpractices across multiple states, undermining the integrity of competitive examinations and adversely affecting the prospects of lakhs of candidates annually. The amendment introduces stringent penal provisions, including enhanced imprisonment and fines, and empowers state governments to establish fast-track courts for expedited trials of such offences. The Bill's passage underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to restore public trust in the examination ecosystem.

Key Points

- The menace of paper leaks and unfair means in public examinations has persisted for decades, affecting examinations conducted by central and state agencies such as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), State Public Service Commissions (SPSCs), National Testing Agency (NTA), and other statutory bodies.
- Instances of paper leaks have been reported in examinations such as NEET-UG, JEE Main, UPSC Civil Services Examination, and state-level recruitment tests, leading to widespread cancellations, re-examinations, and legal challenges.
- The Supreme Court of India, in several judgments, has emphasised the necessity of maintaining the sanctity of examinations to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all candidates, including in cases such as Common Cause v. Union of India (2018) and K. Krishna Murthy v. Union of India (2019).
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, while focusing on holistic education reform, also highlights the need for transparent and credible assessment mechanisms to uphold meritocracy.
- In response to the growing concerns, the Union Government constituted a High-Level Task Force in 2024 to recommend measures for preventing paper leaks, including technological interventions and stricter legal provisions.

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

- The Bill introduces stricter penal provisions for individuals and organised groups involved in paper leaks or other unfair means in public examinations.
- Key penal provisions include a minimum imprisonment of five years (extendable to ten years) and a fine of up to ₹50 lakh for individuals; for organised crimes, the minimum imprisonment is seven years with a fine of up to ₹10 crore.
- The Bill empowers state governments and Union Territory administrations to designate any Sessions Court as a Special Fast-Track Court for the speedy trial of offences under the Act, ensuring timely justice and reducing pendency.
- The amendment recognises the gravity of organised crime syndicates operating across states, which often exploit loopholes in inter-state coordination and technological vulnerabilities to facilitate malpractices.
- The Bill aligns with the broader governance objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasises transparency, accountability, and the use of technology in educational assessments.
- The legislation mandates the use of advanced technological measures, such as encrypted question papers, secure digital platforms, and AI-driven monitoring, to prevent leaks and ensure the integrity of examination processes.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Stricter Punishments	Prescribes minimum 5 years and maximum 10 years imprisonment for individuals involved in paper leaks, with fines up to ₹50 lakh; organised crimes attract minimum 7 years and fines up to ₹10 crore.
Special Fast-Track Courts	Empowers state governments and Union Territories to designate session courts as special fast-track courts for expedited trials under the proposed law.
Zero Tolerance Policy	Institutionalises a formal stance of zero tolerance towards unfair means in public examinations, aligning with broader governance reforms in the education sector.
Technology Integration	Emphasises the optimal use of technology in examination processes to mitigate risks of malpractice and enhance credibility.
Multi-Stakeholder Consultation	Demonstrates openness to constructive inputs from all quarters, including states, as part of the legislative process.

Significance for India

- Strengthens the legal framework to deter malpractice in public examinations, ensuring fairness and equity in assessment processes.
- Enhances public trust in examination systems by addressing systemic vulnerabilities that undermine institutional credibility.

- Protects the career prospects of millions of candidates by preventing disruptions caused by paper leaks and other unfair means.
- Supports the realisation of demographic dividend by ensuring that merit-based selection processes remain unimpaired.
- Reduces the burden on regular courts by establishing specialised tribunals for examination-related offences.

Way Forward

- Establish a national-level nodal agency to oversee uniform implementation and provide technical support to states.
- Develop a phased rollout plan for digital examination systems, prioritising high-risk examinations and regions.
- Conduct regular audits of examination processes to identify vulnerabilities and proactively address gaps.
- Invest in capacity-building for designated fast-track courts, including training for judges and support staff.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026: 1. The Bill proposes a minimum jail term of five years for individuals involved in paper leaks. 2. The Bill empowers state governments to designate any session court as a special fast-track court for trial of offences under the proposed law. 3. The Bill provides for a fine of up to ₹50 lakh for organised crimes related to exam fraud. 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: The Bill prescribes a minimum jail term of five years. Statement 2 is correct: State governments are empowered to designate session courts as special fast-track courts. Statement 3 is incorrect: The 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, seeks to address the menace of exam paper leaks by prescribing stringent penalties. Reason (R): The Bill aims to build a credible examination system by empowering state governments to establish fast-track courts for trial of offences.

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 Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are true. The Bill does aim to address paper leaks through stringent penalties (A). It also empowers state governments to designate fast-track courts (R), but this is a separate provision and not the sole explanation for the stringent penalties.

Mains practice question

The menace of examination paper leaks has undermined the credibility of India's public examination systems for decades. In this context, critically examine the provisions of the Public

Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, and evaluate its potential effectiveness in addressing the issue. Also, discuss the role of technology and inter-governmental coordination in ensuring the integrity of examination systems. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Context and Problem Statement (2 marks)
• Brief background of the paper leak menace in India (e.g., NEET, JEE, UPSC, state-level exams).
• Reference to recent instances and their impact on students' futures and societal trust in examinations.
2. Key Provisions of the Bill (4 marks)
• Penal Provisions: Minimum 5 years ...

POLITY Judicial Pronouncements on Privacy and Data Protection: Evolving Jurisprudence and Institutional Safeguards

Mind map: Judicial Pronouncements on Privacy and Data Protection:

GS Paper II — Fundamental Rights and Judicial Review • GS Paper III — Cyber Security, Digital Governance and Data Protection

> ✎ *The right to privacy under Article 21 is a fundamental right, and any state action infringing upon it must satisfy the tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality, as established in *Puttaswamy...*

PRELIMS POINTER

The Supreme Court of India, in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union of India* (2017), unanimously recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21, extending its protection to personal data...

Why is this in news?

Recent judicial pronouncements have reaffirmed the constitutional status of the right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution, particularly in the context of digital surveillance and data processing by state and non-state actors. These judgments reinforce the jurisprudential foundation laid down in the landmark Puttaswamy case (2017), while also addressing contemporary challenges arising from the proliferation of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and data-driven governance. The decisions underscore the judiciary's role in ensuring that executive actions, including those involving surveillance and data collection, are subject to constitutional scrutiny and procedural safeguards.

Key Points

- The Supreme Court of India, in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union of India (2017), unanimously recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21, extending its protection to personal data and information privacy.
- Judicial review of executive actions involving surveillance has evolved through cases such as People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs Union of India (1997) and K.S. Puttaswamy

(Retd.) vs Union of India (2017), which imposed strict conditions on the exercise of surveillance powers under the Telegraph Act and the Information Technology Act.

- The proliferation of digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and biometric identification systems has intensified concerns regarding unauthorised data collection, profiling, and potential misuse by both state and private entities.
- The judiciary has increasingly relied on the principles of necessity, proportionality, and transparency to assess the legality of state actions involving data processing and surveillance.

What is the judicial framework governing privacy and data protection in India?

- The right to privacy is constitutionally protected under Article 21, as affirmed by the Supreme Court in Puttaswamy (2017), which held that privacy encompasses the right to control personal information and data.
- Judicial review of surveillance measures requires the state to demonstrate that such measures are necessary, proportionate, and subject to procedural safeguards, including prior judicial or executive authorisation.
- The Puttaswamy judgment laid down a three-pronged test for assessing the legality of privacy-infringing state actions: legality, necessity, and proportionality, ensuring that any restriction on privacy must be sanctioned by law, serve a legitimate aim, and be the least intrusive means to achieve that aim.
- The judiciary has also examined the constitutional validity of biometric identification systems, such as Aadhaar, ensuring that their implementation does not result in exclusion or

unauthorised data sharing, as seen in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union of India (2018) and subsequent cases.

- The principle of 'purpose limitation' requires that data collected for a specific purpose cannot be repurposed without explicit consent or legal sanction, aligning with global data protection standards such as the GDPR.
- Judicial pronouncements have emphasised the role of transparency and accountability in data processing, mandating that individuals be informed about the collection, storage, and use of their personal data.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Judicial Pronouncement on Electoral Bonds	Establishes constitutional validity and scope of electoral financing mechanisms under the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
Transparency in Political Funding	Mandates disclosure norms for political parties receiving donations via electoral bonds, enhancing electoral integrity.
Right to Information (RTI) Interface	Links judicial interpretation with RTI Act, 2005, to ensure public access to information on political funding.
Judicial Review of Legislative Actions	Reaffirms the Supreme Court’s authority to examine the constitutionality of parliamentary and electoral laws.
Balance Between Privacy and Accountability	Examines the tension between donor confidentiality and the public’s right to know in democratic governance.

Significance for India

- Clarifies the constitutional framework governing electoral finance, ensuring alignment with Articles 19(1)(a) and 14 of the Constitution.
- Reinforces the principle of free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy, as enshrined in Article 324 and the Preamble.
- Strengthens transparency in political funding, reducing opacity in campaign finance that could influence voter perceptions.
- Encourages accountability among political parties by mandating disclosures on receipt of electoral bonds.
- Demonstrates the judiciary's role in interpreting electoral laws to uphold constitutional values.

Way Forward

- Enhance institutional capacity of the Election Commission to enforce disclosure norms promptly and uniformly.
- Develop standardized digital platforms for real-time reporting and public access to electoral bond data.
- Strengthen cybersecurity frameworks to protect sensitive data related to political funding.
- Promote public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on the importance of electoral transparency.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding judicial activism in India: 1. Judicial activism refers to the proactive role of the judiciary in interpreting the Constitution and laws to protect fundamental rights. 2. The Supreme Court of India has invoked the doctrine of judicial review to strike down laws that violate the Constitution. 3. Judicial activism is explicitly mentioned in Article 13 of the Constitution. 4. The concept of judicial activism is derived from the principle of judicial restraint. 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 2 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect because judicial activism is not explicitly mentioned in Article 13. Statement 4 is incorrect as judicial activism and judicial restraint are opposing principles.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court of India has the power to strike down laws that violate the basic structure of the Constitution. Reason (R): The basic structure doctrine was established in the landmark judgment of Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973). 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. The basic structure doctrine, established in Kesavananda Bharati, empowers the judiciary to strike down laws that violate the Constitution's basic structure.

Mains practice question

"Judicial activism, while aimed at upholding constitutional morality, often risks encroaching upon the domain of the legislature and the executive, thereby undermining the doctrine of separation of powers." Critically examine the validity of this assertion with reference to recent judicial pronouncements and constitutional provisions. (15 Marks)",

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 Marks)
• Define judicial activism and judicial restraint.
• State the doctrine of separation of powers (Montesquieu) and its constitutional basis in India (Arts. 50, 73, 162).
• Briefly mention the constitutional morality framework (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision in the Constituent Assembly Debates).
2. Judicial Activism: Strengths and Justifications (4 …

POLITY Constitutional and Fiscal Implications of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026: A Governance Perspective

Mind map: Constitutional and Fiscal Implications of the Mines and

GS Paper II — Functions and Responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure • GS Paper III — Mineral and Energy Resources, Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources

Why is this in news?

REMEMBER
The MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026, centralises control over mineral revenue generation by restricting State governments from imposing uneven taxes on mineral rights, raising constitutional questions about fiscal federalism...

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, passed by Parliament during the Monsoon Session, has sparked a debate over the distribution of fiscal and regulatory powers between the Union and State governments. The Bill restricts State governments from imposing uneven taxes, cesses, and levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands, a provision that has significant implications for mineral-rich states like Odisha, which contributes approximately 44% of India's mineral wealth. The discourse surrounding the Bill highlights constitutional questions regarding federalism, fiscal autonomy, and the governance of natural resources.

Key Points

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) governs the regulation of mines and minerals in India, delineating the roles of the Union and State governments.
- Mineral-rich states such as Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh derive substantial revenue from mineral royalties, cesses, and taxes, which are critical for local development and welfare schemes.

- The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution divides legislative powers between the Union and the States. Entry 54 (Union List) empowers Parliament to regulate mines and minerals.
- The Union Government has historically sought to standardise mineral taxation to attract investment and streamline regulatory frameworks, while State governments have argued for greater fiscal autonomy to address local developmental needs.
- The MMDR Amendment Bill, 2026, seeks to amend the MMDR Act to restrict State governments from imposing uneven taxes, cesses, and levies on mineral rights, thereby centralising control over mineral revenue generation.
- The passage of the Bill in the Lok Sabha with minimal debate has raised concerns about procedural fairness and the protection of State interests in Parliament.

What is the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026?

- The Bill amends the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, to restrict State governments from imposing uneven taxes, cesses, and levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands.
- The Bill aims to standardise mineral taxation across States to attract investment and reduce regulatory arbitrage, thereby promoting ease of doing business in the mining sector.
- The Bill has been criticised for potentially undermining the fiscal autonomy of State governments, particularly those with significant mineral wealth, by centralising control over mineral revenue generation.

- The Bill's passage with minimal parliamentary debate has raised questions about the adequacy of legislative scrutiny and the protection of State interests in the Union Parliament.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Provision restricting state taxes on mineral rights	Centralises revenue control by limiting state levies, potentially reducing state autonomy in mineral-rich regions.
Lok Sabha passage with limited discussion	Demonstrates procedural concerns in legislative scrutiny, particularly for bills with inter-state economic implications.
Odisha's mineral contribution (44% of India's resources)	Highlights the state's strategic economic role in national steel, power, and infrastructure sectors.
Estimated annual revenue loss to Odisha (Rs 12,000 crore)	Quantifies the fiscal impact of centralised mineral governance on state finances.
Environmental and displacement concerns in mining regions	Links economic policy to socio-ecological challenges in resource-rich states.

Significance for India

- Centralisation of mineral governance may reduce state revenue from royalties and cesses, impacting fiscal federalism.
- Long-term revenue loss for Odisha could constrain developmental expenditure in education, health, and infrastructure.

- Odisha's dominance in iron ore, bauxite, and coal supply chains may face disruptions in investment and production.
- National steel and power sectors reliant on Odisha's minerals could face supply chain volatility.
- Limited parliamentary debate on a bill with far-reaching fiscal and ecological consequences raises questions about legislative scrutiny.

Challenges

- **Fiscal Federalism and State Autonomy** — Conflict between central revenue objectives and state developmental priorities in mineral-rich regions.
- **Environmental and Social Externalities** — Unaddressed concerns over pollution, land degradation, and displacement in mining-intensive districts.
- **Legislative Scrutiny and Procedural Integrity** — Inadequate parliamentary debate on a bill with inter-state economic and ecological ramifications.
- **Economic Disparities and Regional Imbalances** — Possible widening of regional economic disparities due to differential impact on mineral-rich vs. mineral-poor states.

Way Forward

- Convene an inter-governmental task force comprising Centre and state representatives to review the MMDR Amendment Bill's fiscal and ecological provisions.
- Establish a parliamentary standing committee to scrutinise bills with inter-state economic implications before passage.
- Strengthen the National Mineral Policy with explicit provisions for state consultations and environmental safeguards.

- Develop a revenue-sharing formula that balances Centre's fiscal objectives with state developmental needs.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957: 1. The Act empowers state governments to levy taxes on minerals. 2. The Act provides for the regulation of mines and the development of minerals. 3. The Act mandates that all mining leases shall be granted through competitive bidding. 4. The Act prohibits the export of certain minerals listed in the First Schedule. 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 2 are correct as the MMDR Act, 1957 empowers state governments to levy taxes on minerals and regulates mines and mineral development. Statement 3 is incorrect as competitive bidding is not mandatory for all leases under the Act. Statement 4 is incorrect as the Act does not prohibit the export of minerals listed in the First Schedule.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 seeks to restrict state governments from imposing uneven taxes and cesses on mineral-bearing lands. Reason (R): The Bill aims to promote uniformity in mineral taxation across states to enhance ease of doing business in the mining sector.

1. A is correct but R is incorrect

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

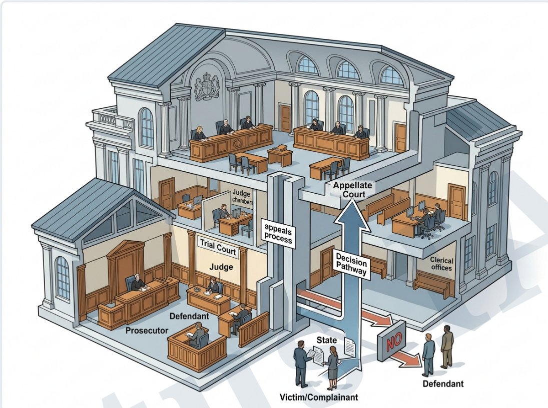
Answer: Both A and R are correct but R is not the correct explanation of A — Both the Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are correct, and the Reason (R) correctly explains the Assertion (A). The Amendment Bill seeks to restrict state governments from imposing uneven taxes and cesses on mineral-bearing lands to promote uniformity in mineral taxation.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the constitutional and federal dimensions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026. How far does the Bill address the concerns of fiscal federalism while balancing the need for sustainable mining and equitable resource governance? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Constitutional Framework:
• Article 246 (7th Schedule): Distribution of legislative powers between Union and States; Entry 54 (Union List) and Entry 23 (State List) on minerals.
• Doctrine of Federalism: Balancing autonomy of states with national economic interests.
• Landmark judgments: State of West Bengal v. Kesoram Industries Ltd. (2004), Mineral Area …

POLITY Judicial Limits on Appellate Sentence Enhancement: Constitutional and Statutory Safeguards in Criminal Appeals



3D cutaway: Appellate court cannot enhance sentence without appeal by State, victim

Supreme Court · Appellate court · State appeal · Judicial discretion · Sentencing power · Procedural fairness

GS Paper II — Judiciary and Judicial Process • GS Paper III — Criminal Justice System and Legal Reforms

> ✎ Appellate courts cannot enhance sentences *suo motu* without an appeal by the State, victim, or complainant, as this violates the principles of natural justice and the prohibition of *in pejus* under…

Why is this in news?

The Supreme Court, in a landmark judgment

PRELIMS POINTER

The case originated from a heinous triple-murder in Tamil Nadu in 2007, involving the former Vice-Chancellor delivered on August 28, 2026, clarified the constitutional and statutory limits on the power of appellate courts to enhance sentences without an appeal by the State, victim, or complainant. The ruling, delivered in the context of a triple-murder case from Tamil Nadu, underscores the principle that judicial discretion in sentencing must be exercised within the framework of procedural fairness and statutory constraints, thereby reinforcing the doctrine of audi alteram partem (hear the other side) and the prohibition of in pejus (worsening the position of) the accused without due process.

of Calicut University, his wife, and their security guard.

Key Points

- The case originated from a heinous triple-murder in Tamil Nadu in 2007, involving the former Vice-Chancellor of Calicut University, his wife, and their security guard. The accused, Ambarasu and Gopi, were convicted by the trial court, with Ambarasu receiving the death penalty and Gopi sentenced to life imprisonment.
- The Madras High Court, in a subsequent appeal, enhanced Gopi’s sentence from 'imprisonment for life' to 'imprisonment for the remainder of his natural life,' a distinction critical under Indian criminal law as the latter bars remission entirely.
- The Supreme Court’s intervention was necessitated by the High Court’s suo motu enhancement of the sentence, which the apex court deemed impermissible in the absence of an appeal by the State, victim, or complainant.
- The judgment reaffirms the foundational principle that appellate courts cannot, on their own motion, worsen the position of an accused by enhancing sentences, as this would

violate the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

- The case also highlights the legal distinction between 'imprisonment for life' (which may be subject to remission after 14 years under Section 433A of the CrPC) and 'imprisonment for the remainder of life' (which precludes remission entirely).

What is the Legal Principle Governing Sentence Enhancement in Appellate Courts?

- Prohibition of Suo Motu Enhancement: Appellate courts cannot enhance the sentence of a convict on their own (suo motu) unless an appeal is filed by the State, victim, or complainant. This principle is rooted in the doctrine of audi alteram partem, ensuring that the accused is not placed in a worse position without an opportunity to be heard.
- In Pejus Prohibition: The Latin maxim in pejus (meaning 'to the worse') prohibits appellate courts from enhancing sentences without an appeal, as this would violate the accused’s right to fair trial under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court has consistently held that such enhancement is impermissible unless justified by an appeal.
- *Remission Under Section 433A of the CrPC: Section 433A of the Code of Criminal Procedure mandates that a convict sentenced to 'imprisonment for life' may be considered for remission only after serving a minimum of 14 years. This provision balances the principles of justice and rehabilitation with the gravity of the offence.
- *Distinction Between Life Imprisonment and Remainder of Life: The judgment underscores the legal difference between 'imprisonment for life' (which may be subject to remission)

and 'imprisonment for the remainder of life' (which precludes remission entirely). This distinction is crucial in determining the severity of the sentence and the convict’s eligibility for early release.

- *Judicial Restraint in Sentencing: The ruling reinforces the principle of judicial restraint, wherein appellate courts must refrain from enhancing sentences unless explicitly empowered by statute or justified by an appeal. This principle prevents arbitrary judicial overreach and ensures consistency in sentencing.
- *Role of the Prosecution and Victim: The judgment highlights the role of the prosecution and the victim in initiating appeals for sentence enhancement. This ensures that the State’s interest in justice is balanced with the rights of the accused, preventing unilateral judicial action.

Significance for India

- Reaffirms the principle that appellate courts cannot act as prosecutors by enhancing sentences suo-motu, thereby upholding judicial restraint and the separation of powers.
- Clarifies the procedural boundaries of revisional jurisdiction, preventing arbitrary judicial overreach in sentencing.
- Reinforces the constitutional guarantee against double jeopardy (Article 20(2)), ensuring that convicts are not subjected to harsher penalties without due process.
- Highlights the procedural safeguards in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), particularly Section 433A, which regulates remission for life convicts.
- Underscores the need for victim-centric justice, where the victim or their representatives have a formal role in seeking harsher penalties.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the powers of an appellate court under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973: 1. An appellate court can enhance the sentence of a convict on its own motion without an appeal by the State or the victim. 2. Section 433A of the CrPC mandates that a sentence of life imprisonment cannot be remitted before 14 years of actual imprisonment. 3. The Supreme Court in the present case held that sentences must run consecutively unless specifically directed otherwise. 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 Supreme Court held that an appellate court cannot enhance the sentence suo motu without an appeal by the State or the victim. Statement 2 is correct: Section 433A CrPC explicitly bars remission of life imprisonment before 14 years. Statement 3 is incorrect: The Supreme Court directed that sentences should run concurrently, not consecutively.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Supreme Court has held that an appellate court cannot enhance the sentence of a convict on its own without an appeal by the State or the victim. Reason (R): The appellate court is bound by the principle of judicial restraint and must adhere to the limits of its jurisdiction as prescribed under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

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 correct. The Supreme Court's ruling in the present case establishes that an appellate court cannot enhance a sentence suo motu, reflecting judicial restraint. The reason correctly explains the assertion by grounding it in the statutory limits of the CrPC.

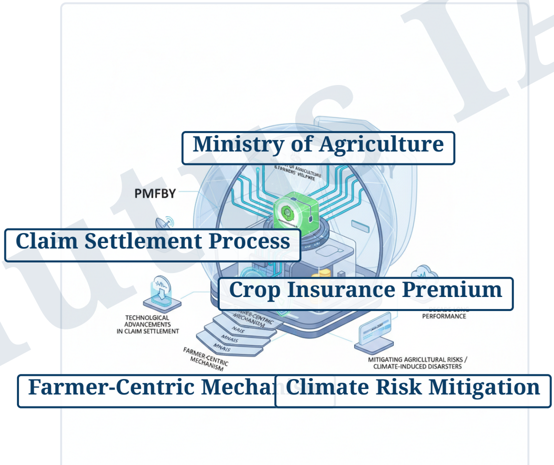
Mains practice question

The Supreme Court has reiterated that an appellate court cannot enhance the sentence of a convict on its own motion without an appeal by the State or the victim. Critically examine the legal and constitutional principles underlying this proposition. Also, discuss the implications of such a ruling for the rights of victims and the doctrine of judicial restraint in Indian criminal jurisprudence. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Legal Framework and Statutory Basis:
• Reference to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, particularly Sections 372 (right to appeal), 377 (State's appeal against inadequate sentence), and 378 (appeal in case of acquittal).
• Explanation of Section 433A CrPC: Mandatory 14-year period for remission of life imprisonment.
• Distinction between 'imprisonment …

Polity & Governance

POLITY & GOVERNANCE Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY): A Comprehensive Crop Insurance Mechanism for Climate-Resilient Agriculture and Farmer Livelihood Protection



3D cutaway: प्रधानमंत्री फसल बीमा योजना

GS Paper III — Agriculture • GS Paper III — Disaster Management • GS Paper III — Government Schemes

Why is this in news?

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has been highlighted in a recent Press Information Bureau

REMEMBER

PMFBY is a flagship crop insurance scheme launched in 2016 to protect farmers from climate-induced agricultural risks, with premiums kept low and affordable and claims

(PIB) backgrounder, underscoring its continued financial allocation of ₹12,200 crore in the Union Budget 2026–27. The scheme's decade-long performance, technological advancements in claim settlement, and its role in mitigating agricultural risks during climate-induced disasters have been emphasized, reinforcing its significance in India's agricultural policy framework.

disbursed through technology-driven, transparent...

Key Points

- Launched on 18 February 2016, the PMFBY replaced earlier crop insurance schemes like the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS) and the Modified National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (MNAIS) to provide a more comprehensive and farmer-centric insurance mechanism.
- The scheme was conceptualized under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, to address the vulnerabilities of small and marginal farmers to climate variability and natural disasters.
- PMFBY operates on the principle of 'One Nation – One Scheme' to ensure uniformity in coverage, premium rates, and claim settlement processes across India.
- Over the past decade (2016–2026), the scheme has covered over 92.46 crore farmer applications and disbursed claims exceeding ₹2.06 lakh crore to 26.33 crore farmers, demonstrating its scale and impact.
- The scheme is implemented through a multi-stakeholder framework involving insurance companies, state governments, financial institutions, and technology partners to ensure efficient delivery and transparency.

What is the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)?

- PMFBY is a centrally sponsored crop insurance scheme designed to provide financial support to farmers in the event of crop loss or damage due to natural calamities, pests, diseases, or other specified risks.
- The scheme covers all food crops (cereals, millets, pulses), oilseeds, annual commercial/horticultural crops, and even pre-sowing and post-harvest losses, ensuring comprehensive risk mitigation.
- Coverage includes risks such as drought, flood, cyclone, hailstorm, pest attacks, diseases, unseasonal rainfall, landslides, and localized disasters, tailored to regional agricultural vulnerabilities.
- Premium rates are highly subsidized: 2% for Kharif crops, 1.5% for Rabi crops, and 5% for commercial/horticultural crops, with the balance premium borne by the central and state governments in a 50:50 ratio.
- Technological integration has been a cornerstone of PMFBY's evolution, with initiatives like the Weather Information Network and Data Systems (WINDS) and the Yield Estimation System (YES-Tech) enhancing accuracy, speed, and transparency in claim settlement.
- PMFBY operates through a multi-channel enrollment process, including Common Service Centres (CSCs), agricultural departments, and online portals, with claims processed within a stipulated timeframe to ensure timely compensation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Comprehensive Risk Coverage	Provides insurance against pre-sowing risks (failed sowing), mid-season adversities (floods, droughts, cyclones, hailstorms), localized disasters (landslides, waterlogging), and post-harvest losses (cyclones, unseasonal rains).
Affordable Premium Rates	Subsidized premiums ensure high farmer participation; farmers pay a nominal share (e.g., 1.5–2% for Kharif, 5% for Rabi), with the balance covered by the central and state governments.
Technology Integration	Uses Yield Estimation System (YES-Tech) and Weather Information Network and Data Systems (WINDS) for transparent, timely, and accurate claim settlements, reducing disputes and delays.
Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)	Claims are disbursed directly to farmers' bank accounts, ensuring transparency and minimizing leakages in the payout process.
Inclusive Eligibility	Covers all farmers, including tenant farmers and sharecroppers, provided they meet documentation requirements (land records, lease agreements, or sowing certificates).

Significance for India

- Mitigates income volatility caused by climate-induced crop losses, ensuring financial stability for farming households.
- Enables farmers to repay agricultural loans and reinvest in subsequent cropping seasons, preventing debt traps.

- Encourages adoption of climate-resilient practices by reducing perceived risks associated with high-input farming.
- Supports crop diversification by providing a financial cushion against failure of high-risk, high-reward crops.
- Demonstrates the state's role in risk-sharing, aligning with the constitutional directive to promote agricultural welfare (Article 38, 39, 48).

Challenges

- **Low Awareness and Participation Gaps** — Despite subsidized premiums, many small and marginal farmers remain unaware of the scheme or lack access to enrollment mechanisms.
- **Documentation and Eligibility Hurdles** — Stringent land record requirements exclude tenant farmers and sharecroppers who lack formal documentation, despite being economically vulnerable.
- **Delayed and Inadequate Claim Settlements** — Despite technological advancements, claim processing delays occur due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, especially during large-scale disasters.
- **Climate Change and Increasing Frequency of Extreme Events** — Rising temperatures, erratic monsoons, and increased cyclonic activity exacerbate crop losses, straining the scheme's financial sustainability.

Relevance for Prelims

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana · Crop Insurance · Weather-based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBCIS) · National Crop Insurance Portal · Farmers' Welfare · Agricultural Risk Mitigation · Weather Information

Network and Data Systems (WINDS) · Yield Estimation System (YES-Tech)

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY): 1. PMFBY provides insurance coverage for crop losses due to natural calamities such as drought, flood, cyclone, and hailstorm. 2. The premium rates under PMFBY are uniformly fixed at 2% of the sum insured for all crops across India. 3. PMFBY includes coverage for post-harvest losses due to cyclones and unseasonal rains. 4. The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in collaboration with state governments. 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 as PMFBY covers natural calamities and post-harvest losses. Statement 2 is incorrect because premium rates vary by crop type (e.g., 2% for kharif, 1.5% for rabi, and 5% for commercial/horticultural crops). Statement 4 is correct as the scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare with state governments.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) aims to provide financial support to farmers in the event of crop failure due to natural disasters. Reason (R): PMFBY is a voluntary scheme, and farmers are not mandated to enrol in it.

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 PMFBY provides financial support for crop failure due to natural disasters. However, Reason (R) is also true but does not correctly explain (A), as PMFBY is voluntary but incentivised through low premiums and government subsidies.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the role of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in enhancing agricultural resilience and farmer livelihoods in India. Also, analyse the challenges in its implementation and suggest measures to improve its efficacy. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (1 mark)
• Brief background of PMFBY: Launched in 2016, aims to provide affordable crop insurance to farmers against natural calamities, pests, and diseases.
• Statutory/Institutional framework: Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in collaboration with state governments and insurance companies.
2. Role of PMFBY in Enhancing Agricultural …

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Fisheries Sector Crisis: Policy Gaps, Economic Fallout, and Institutional Responses in India's Marine Ecosystem

Mind map: Fisheries Sector Crisis: Policy Gaps, Economic Fallout,

GS Paper III — Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries • GS Paper III — Food Processing and Related Industries • GS Paper III — Government Budgeting and Financial Inclusion

> ✎ *The fisheries sector crisis in Kerala exemplifies the failure of policy implementation and institutional coordination in balancing ecological sustainability with economic livelihoods, necessitating…*

Why is this in news?

PRELIMS POINTER

India ranks as the world's second-largest fish producer, with marine fisheries contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and export earnings.

Recent reports highlight a severe contraction in marine fish catches and prolonged operational disruptions in Kerala's fisheries sector, exacerbated by policy delays and inadequate institutional responses. The crisis underscores systemic gaps in policy implementation, financial relief mechanisms, and data-driven governance, threatening the livelihoods of coastal communities and the stability of marine export markets. The situation exemplifies the broader challenges in India's fisheries governance, where ecological, economic, and institutional dimensions intersect.

Key Points

- India ranks as the world's second-largest fish producer, with marine fisheries contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and export earnings.
- The sector employs over 14 million people, including 4.5 million active fishers, with Kerala accounting for a substantial share of marine fish landings.
- The Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), launched in 2020, aims to double fish production, enhance exports, and improve infrastructure, with an outlay of ₹20,050 crore over five years.
- Marine fisheries in Kerala are governed by the Kerala Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 2004, which mandates seasonal fishing bans to protect fish stocks and spawning grounds.
- Climate change and erratic weather patterns have intensified operational risks, including cyclones, rough seas, and shifting fish migration routes.
- The sector faces dual pressures: ecological sustainability demands (e.g., trawl bans, mesh size regulations) and economic imperatives (e.g., export demand, livelihood security).

What Constitutes the Fisheries Sector Crisis in India?

- Declining Fish Catches: Staple species such as sardine and mackerel have seen drastic reductions in landings.
- Operational Disruptions: Prolonged fishing bans (e.g., 30+ days over two months) and weather advisories have grounded fleets, disrupting supply chains and market availability.
- Market Volatility: Scarcity of high-value species has destabilized export markets and local consumption.
- Institutional Gaps: Relief mechanisms fail to cover unregistered workers (e.g., daily-wage deckhands, allied laborers), leaving a significant portion of the workforce economically vulnerable.
- Policy Delays: Despite budgetary allocations under PMMSY and state schemes, disbursement of financial aid, compensation, and infrastructure support remains slow, exacerbating distress.
- Data Asymmetry: Official databases underrepresent seasonal and informal workers, complicating targeted relief and policy formulation.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Post-trawl ban season	A legally mandated period restricting trawling to allow fish stock recovery, impacting livelihoods of mechanised and traditional fishers.
Kerala’s marine fisheries sector	A critical coastal economy contributing to employment, food security, and export earnings, particularly in Kerala.

Feature	Significance
Weather disruptions	Increased frequency and intensity of cyclones, monsoon variability, and adverse sea conditions affecting fishing operations.
Price volatility in marine products	Sharp fluctuations in market prices due to supply shortages, affecting both domestic consumption and export markets.
Administrative gaps in relief distribution	Exclusion of unregistered or seasonal workers from government compensation schemes, exacerbating socio-economic distress.

Significance for India

- The fisheries sector is a vital component of India's blue economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings through exports of marine products.
- Kerala's marine fisheries alone support over 1.2 million livelihoods directly and indirectly, with substantial backward and forward linkages to allied industries like processing, transport, and retail.
- Marine fisheries are a critical component of India's maritime security and coastal resilience, requiring sustainable management to prevent overfishing and ecological degradation.
- The sector's stability is linked to India's food sovereignty and nutritional security, given the high protein content of fish in the Indian diet.
- The fishing community, particularly in Kerala, is a marginalised socio-economic group with limited access to

formal credit, insurance, and social security schemes, making them vulnerable to economic shocks.

Challenges

- **Decline in Fish Stocks and Catch Volumes** — Overfishing, illegal trawling, and climate change-induced habitat degradation have led to a sharp decline in key species such as sardine, mackerel, and prawns.
- **Policy and Regulatory Delays** — Delays in the implementation of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) guidelines and state-level fisheries policies have left fishers without clear operational frameworks.
- **Administrative and Institutional Gaps** — The lack of a comprehensive and updated registry of fishers, particularly seasonal and daily-wage workers, excludes a significant portion of the workforce from government relief schemes.
- **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation** — Increasing sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events are disrupting marine ecosystems and fish migration patterns.

Relevance for Prelims

Marine Fisheries Policy · Blue Revolution Scheme · National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) · Fish Stock Assessment · Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification · Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Fisheries · Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) · Fishing Ban Regulations

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Marine Fisheries Policy 2020 of India: 1. It aims to double the marine fish production by 2025. 2. The policy mandates the establishment of a National Fisheries Regulatory Authority. 3. It introduces a uniform fishing ban period across all maritime states. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only one — Statement 1 is incorrect as the policy targets doubling fish production by 2025 but does not specify marine fish exclusively. Statement 2 is incorrect; the policy does not create a new regulatory authority. Statement 3 is incorrect as fishing ban periods are state-specific and not uniform.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notifications primarily aim to protect coastal ecosystems from industrial and developmental activities. Reason (R): The CRZ notifications restrict fishing activities in certain zones to conserve marine biodiversity.

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 CRZ notifications are designed to protect coastal ecosystems from industrial and developmental activities. Reason (R) is false because CRZ notifications do not restrict fishing activities; they regulate coastal land use and development.

Mains practice question

The decline in marine fish catches and policy delays have exacerbated the crisis in India's fisheries sector, particularly affecting coastal livelihoods. Critically examine the structural and policy-related factors contributing to this crisis, with reference to the Marine Fisheries Policy 2020 and the role of state governments. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Structural Factors:
• Overfishing and unsustainable practices leading to depleted fish stocks (cite Meenakumari Committee 2012 report on marine fisheries resources).
• Climate change impacts on marine ecosystems (e.g., rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification) reducing fish productivity.
• Dependence of coastal communities on fisheries for livelihoods (highlight data from National Fisheries Development …

Economy

ECONOMY RBI Bulletin August 2026: Domestic Resilience Amidst Global Geopolitical and Trade Uncertainties — Analysing Macroeconomic Indicators and Policy Implications

Mind map: RBI Bulletin August 2026: Domestic Resilience Amidst Glo

GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment • GS Paper III — Effects of Liberalisation on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth • GS Paper III — Inclusive Growth and Issues Arising from it

Why is this in news?

The Reserve Bank of India's August 2026 Bulletin, released on 25 August 2026, provides a comprehensive assessment of the domestic

REMEMBER

The RBI Bulletin August 2026 underscores India's economic resilience amid global uncertainties, marked by stable core inflation, improved monsoon conditions, and rebound in foreign capital inflows.

and global macroeconomic landscape. It highlights India's economic resilience amid persistent geopolitical tensions and trade-related uncertainties, while also noting the recovery in agricultural activity due to improved monsoon conditions, stable core inflation, and a rebound in foreign capital inflows. The Bulletin serves as a critical reference for policymakers, analysts, and aspirants preparing for the UPSC Civil Services Examination, as it integrates real-time data with structural economic insights.

Key Points

- The RBI Bulletin is a monthly publication by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), providing an analytical overview of the Indian economy, monetary policy developments, and global economic trends.
- The August 2026 issue follows the Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) bi-monthly review held from 3–5 August 2026, where key policy rates were deliberated upon in the context of evolving macroeconomic conditions.
- Global economic conditions in mid-2026 are marked by heightened geopolitical tensions, persistent trade disruptions, and supply chain volatilities, which have exerted pressure on inflation and growth trajectories worldwide.
- India's domestic economy has exhibited resilience, with domestic demand acting as a key driver of growth, supported by rising manufacturing and services sector activity.
- The south-west monsoon, which had recorded a deficit in June 2026, showed significant improvement in July, positively impacting agricultural output and rural demand.
- Headline CPI inflation witnessed a marginal increase due to food price pressures, while core inflation remained stable, indicating anchored inflation expectations.

What is the RBI Bulletin?

- The RBI Bulletin is a monthly publication issued by the Reserve Bank of India, providing a detailed analysis of India's macroeconomic conditions, monetary policy developments, and global economic trends.
- It includes articles on thematic topics such as the State of the Economy, financial stability, and structural reforms, authored by RBI economists and researchers.
- The Bulletin serves as an authoritative source for policymakers, researchers, and market participants, offering data-driven insights into inflation, growth, liquidity, and external sector dynamics.
- Each issue features a bi-monthly monetary policy statement, speeches by RBI officials, current statistics on key economic indicators, and research articles.
- The views expressed in the Bulletin articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official stance of the RBI.
- The Bulletin plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse on economic policy, providing a platform for evidence-based analysis and policy recommendations.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Statement (August 2026)	Outlines the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) stance on key policy rates, liquidity measures, and forward guidance, influencing inflation expectations, credit growth, and economic activity.

Feature	Significance
Article on State of the Economy	Provides a comprehensive assessment of domestic and global economic conditions, highlighting resilience amid geopolitical and trade uncertainties.
Headline CPI Inflation Rise	Indicates a marginal increase in headline inflation, primarily driven by food inflation, while core inflation remains stable, reflecting underlying price stability.
Rebound in Foreign Capital Inflows	Signals improved investor confidence and external sector strength, supporting balance of payments and exchange rate stability.
Easing Liquidity Conditions	Facilitates credit growth and investment activity by ensuring adequate liquidity in the banking system, aligning with monetary policy objectives.

Significance for India

- The domestic economy's resilience amid global headwinds underscores the effectiveness of India's macroeconomic management frameworks, including inflation targeting and flexible exchange rate policies.
- Stable core inflation suggests that demand-side pressures remain contained, reducing the risk of second-round effects from supply shocks.
- The RBI's bi-monthly policy statement serves as a critical tool for anchoring inflation expectations and guiding market sentiment.
- Easing liquidity conditions indicate proactive liquidity management, ensuring alignment with policy rate decisions and supporting credit flow to productive sectors.

- The improvement in the south-west monsoon in July after a June deficit highlights the importance of climate-resilient agricultural policies and infrastructure.

Challenges

- **Global Geopolitical and Trade Uncertainties** — Ongoing geopolitical tensions and trade-related disruptions pose risks to global supply chains, affecting commodity prices and inflation dynamics.
- **Food Inflation Management** — Food inflation remains a persistent challenge, driven by supply-side constraints, climate variability, and structural issues in agricultural markets.
- **Liquidity Management and Credit Growth** — While easing liquidity conditions support credit growth, ensuring its equitable distribution across sectors—particularly MSMEs and rural areas—remains a challenge.
- **Monsoon Variability and Agricultural Resilience** — Climate change-induced variability in monsoon patterns threatens agricultural output, food security, and rural livelihoods.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) August 2026 Bulletin: 1. The Bulletin includes the bi-monthly monetary policy statement issued between August 03-05, 2026. 2. The article in the Bulletin focuses exclusively on the challenges faced by the global economy, excluding any analysis of the domestic economy. 3. The Bulletin highlights that core inflation in India remained stable despite a fractional rise in headline CPI inflation. 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 RBI Bulletin August 2026 includes the bi-monthly monetary policy statement issued between August 03-05, 2026. Statement 2 is incorrect because the article also addresses the domestic economy's resilience. Statement 3 is correct as the Bulletin notes core inflation remained stable despite a marginal increase in headline CPI inflation.

Q2. Assertion (A): The south-west monsoon in India picked up in July 2026 after recording a deficit in June. Reason (R): The RBI Bulletin August 2026 attributes the recovery in monsoon to buoyant domestic demand and rising manufacturing activity.

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 RBI Bulletin states the south-west monsoon picked up in July after a deficit in June. Reason (R) is also true but does not correctly explain the assertion, as the Bulletin links monsoon recovery to weather patterns rather than economic factors.

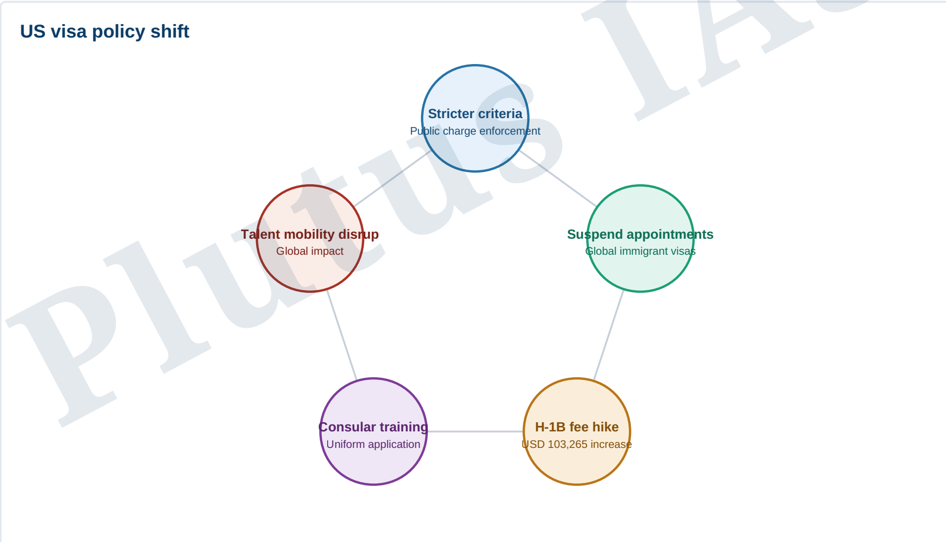
Mains practice question

The Reserve Bank of India’s August 2026 Bulletin highlights the resilience of the domestic economy amid global headwinds. Critically examine the factors contributing to this resilience, with particular reference to inflation dynamics, monsoon conditions, and external sector performance. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks)
• Briefly define the RBI Bulletin and its significance as a monthly publication.
• State the central claim: domestic resilience amid global fragility.
2. Inflation Dynamics (4 marks)
• Define headline CPI inflation and core inflation as per RBI's framework.
• Explain the fractional rise in headline CPI inflation …

Economy / Governance

ECONOMY / GOVERNANCE Public Charge Doctrine and Its Implications for Global Immigration Governance: A Case Study of Recent US Visa Policy Adjustments



US visa policy shift

GS Paper II — International Relations — Global Governance and Immigration Policies • GS Paper III — Economy — Labour Migration and Economic Dependence

✎ *The 'public charge' doctrine in US immigration law permits the denial of visas or green cards to applicants likely to*

> *become dependent on government welfare, with enforcement guided by a 'totality of...*

Why is this in news?

> **PRELIMS POINTER**
> The 'public charge' doctrine has been a cornerstone of US immigration policy since the late 19th century, originally rooted in the Immigration Act of 1882, which authorised the exclusion of immigrants deemed likely to...

The United States Department of State has temporarily suspended all immigrant visa appointments worldwide, citing the need to rigorously enforce the 'public charge' doctrine—a legal principle under US immigration law that denies visas to applicants likely to become dependent on public welfare. This policy shift, framed as part of a broader immigration crackdown, has significant implications for global migration flows, consular practices, and the economic integration of skilled and unskilled labour. The decision follows a reported USD 103,265 proposed fee hike for H-1B visas, underscoring the Trump administration's emphasis on reducing immigration dependency while prioritising domestic labour market protection.

Key Points

- The 'public charge' doctrine has been a cornerstone of US immigration policy since the late 19th century, originally rooted in the Immigration Act of 1882, which authorised the exclusion of immigrants deemed likely to become a 'public charge'.
- The doctrine was codified in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952, which defines a 'public charge' as an

individual who is likely to become primarily dependent on government assistance for subsistence.

- In 1999, the US Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security issued joint guidance clarifying that receipt of certain non-cash benefits (e.g., Medicaid, food stamps) does not automatically render an applicant a public charge, while cash assistance or institutionalisation for long-term care may.
- The H-1B visa, a non-immigrant work visa, has been a focal point of US immigration policy due to its reliance by technology companies in India and China to hire skilled professionals in specialty occupations.

What is the 'Public Charge' Doctrine in US Immigration Law?

- The 'public charge' doctrine is a legal principle under US immigration law (Immigration and Nationality Act, 1952) that allows authorities to deny visas or green cards to applicants who are likely to become primarily dependent on government assistance for subsistence.
- The doctrine applies to both immigrant visas (permanent residency) and certain non-immigrant visas, though its enforcement is more stringent for immigrant applicants.
- Key factors considered in public charge determinations include: age, health, family status, assets, resources, financial status, education, and skills. Applicants with limited financial means or poor health may be deemed ineligible.
- The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Department of State use a 'totality of circumstances' test to assess whether an applicant is likely to become a public charge, considering both positive and negative factors.

- Certain categories of immigrants are exempt from the public charge ground of inadmissibility, including refugees, asylees, and certain humanitarian parolees.
- The doctrine does not apply to US citizens or lawful permanent residents sponsoring family members, though sponsors must demonstrate financial ability to support the immigrant (Affidavit of Support, Form I-864).

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Global suspension of immigrant visa appointments	Disrupts international mobility and labour flows, particularly affecting skilled workers from countries like India and China who rely on H-1B visas for employment in the US.
Public charge evaluation framework	Introduces stricter criteria for visa eligibility, prioritising applicants unlikely to depend on US public benefits, thereby altering immigration policy orientation.
Consular officer training initiative	Ensures uniform application of new screening standards across US embassies and consulates, reducing discretionary variations in visa adjudication.
H-1B visa fee hike (USD 103,265)	Increases financial burden on employers and employees, potentially reducing the attractiveness of the US as a destination for skilled labour.
Geographical targeting of visa restrictions	Demonstrates a selective approach to immigration policy, focusing on applicants from specific countries under the 'public charge' rationale.

Significance for India

- Disruption of global talent mobility, particularly in technology and specialised sectors reliant on H-1B visas.
- Potential increase in operational costs for US-based companies due to higher visa fees and stricter screening processes.
- Reinforcement of the 'public charge' doctrine in US immigration law, which has historical precedents but is being applied more aggressively.
- Alignment with broader US immigration policy trends aimed at reducing dependence on public welfare systems.
- Strain on US-India relations, given the high number of H-1B visa applicants from India and the tech sector's reliance on this programme.

Relevance for Prelims

Public Charge Doctrine · H-1B visa · Immigrant visa · Consular discretion · US State Department · Green card eligibility · Non-immigrant visas · Economic dependence criteria

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the US 'Public Charge' doctrine in immigration law: 1. The doctrine allows US immigration authorities to deny visas to applicants who are likely to become primarily dependent on government financial support. 2. The doctrine applies exclusively to non-immigrant visas such as H-1B. 3. The US State Department has recently launched a global training initiative to ensure uniform application of the doctrine by consular officers. How many of the above statements are correct?

1. Only one

2. Only two
3. All three
4. None

Answer: All three — Statements 1 and 3 are correct. Statement 2 is incorrect as the doctrine applies to immigrant visas, not exclusively to non-immigrant visas like H-1B.

Q2. Assertion (A): The recent US decision to suspend all immigrant visa appointments globally is based on the 'Public Charge' doctrine. Reason (R): The doctrine aims to prevent immigrants from accessing US public benefits reserved for qualified Americans.

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 and reason are true. The suspension of immigrant visa appointments is grounded in the 'Public Charge' doctrine, which seeks to ensure that visa applicants are unlikely to become dependent on US public benefits.

Mains practice question

The United States has recently suspended all immigrant visa appointments globally, citing the 'Public Charge' doctrine as the legal basis. Critically examine the doctrinal foundations, administrative mechanisms, and policy implications of the 'Public Charge' rule in US immigration law. Also, analyse its potential impact on global labour mobility and the Indian IT sector. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Doctrinal Foundations: Define 'Public Charge' under US immigration law (8 CFR § 212.21) and its statutory basis (Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 212(a)(4)). Trace its historical evolution from early 20th-century immigration restrictions to contemporary interpretations.
2. Administrative Mechanisms: Explain the role of the US State Department and consular officers in adjudicating visas ...

ECONOMY/GOVERNANCE Semiconductor Tariffs in the United States: Policy Objectives, Economic Implications, and Global Supply Chain Dynamics

Source: Wikimedia Commons — The White House (Public domain)

GS Paper II — International Relations (Trade Policies, Supply Chain Resilience)
• GS Paper III — Economy (Tariffs, Industrial Policy, Manufacturing Sector)

Why is this in news?

> **REMEMBER**
> Semiconductor tariffs are a tool of industrial policy aimed at enhancing domestic manufacturing capacity, reducing supply chain vulnerabilities, and addressing national security concerns, but they risk trade retaliation…

The United States is reportedly considering a new round of tariffs on semiconductors and related electronic products to bolster domestic semiconductor manufacturing, reduce reliance on foreign supply chains, and address national security concerns. This policy shift, driven by the Trump administration, reflects broader efforts to reshape global trade dynamics in critical technology sectors, with potential implications for India's semiconductor ecosystem and global supply chain stability.

Key Points

- Semiconductors are the foundational component of modern electronics, powering devices from smartphones to data centres and military systems, making them a strategic industry.
- The global semiconductor supply chain is highly concentrated, with Taiwan (TSMC), South Korea (Samsung), and the US (Intel) dominating advanced chip production, while China remains a major consumer and mid-tier producer.
- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, prompting governments worldwide to reassess dependencies in critical sectors like semiconductors.
- The US has historically relied on imports for advanced semiconductors, particularly from Taiwan, raising concerns about supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical tensions, such as the potential escalation in the Taiwan Strait.

- The US-China trade war (2018–2020) and subsequent semiconductor export controls have intensified efforts to decouple critical technology supply chains from adversarial nations.

What are Semiconductor Tariffs and Why Are They Proposed?

- Semiconductor tariffs are customs duties imposed on the import of semiconductor chips and related electronic components, aimed at protecting domestic industries and encouraging local production.
- The proposed measures by the US administration seek to extend tariffs beyond chips to include downstream products like laptops, gaming consoles, and data centre servers, which rely on semiconductor inputs.
- The policy framework under consideration includes tariff relief for foreign companies that invest in US-based semiconductor manufacturing, incentivising reshoring or nearshoring of production facilities.
- The rationale for tariffs includes reducing dependence on foreign supply chains, mitigating national security risks associated with reliance on single-source suppliers (e.g., Taiwan), and stimulating domestic job creation in high-tech manufacturing.
- Critics argue that tariffs may increase costs for US consumers and businesses, disrupt global supply chains, and provoke retaliatory measures from trading partners, exacerbating trade tensions.
- The semiconductor industry is capital-intensive, with advanced fabrication plants (fabs) requiring investments of $10–20 billion and lead times of 3–5 years, limiting the

immediate impact of tariff policies on domestic production capacity.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Proposed semiconductor tariffs	Aims to incentivize domestic semiconductor manufacturing by imposing duties on imports, thereby reducing reliance on foreign suppliers.
Tariff relief for foreign investors	Encourages foreign companies to establish semiconductor fabrication units in the U.S. by offering tariff concessions based on investment commitments.
Gradual implementation of tariffs	Proposed phased rollout to mitigate immediate disruptions to supply chains while transitioning toward self-sufficiency.
Focus on advanced chip manufacturing	Targets high-end semiconductor production to bolster U.S. technological sovereignty and national security.
Concerns over supply chain resilience	Highlights vulnerabilities in U.S. reliance on Asian semiconductor suppliers, particularly Taiwan, amid geopolitical tensions.

Significance for India

- Stimulates domestic investment in semiconductor fabrication, potentially creating high-skilled employment and reducing trade deficits in high-tech sectors.
- May increase production costs for U.S. technology firms reliant on imported semiconductors, affecting competitiveness in global markets.

- Reduces dependence on foreign semiconductor supply chains, particularly those in East Asia, which are vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions.
- Enhances U.S. technological autonomy in sectors vital for defense, AI, and digital infrastructure, thereby strengthening national security.
- Demonstrates a shift toward industrial policy interventions to revive domestic manufacturing, akin to initiatives like the CHIPS Act (2022).

Challenges

- **Geopolitical Dependence on Semiconductors** — Over 90% of advanced semiconductor manufacturing is concentrated in Taiwan, posing risks to U.S. supply chains in the event of a geopolitical crisis.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions** — Gradual tariff implementation may not address immediate supply shortages, particularly for sectors like AI-driven data centers with surging demand.
- **Investment and Time Lag** — Building advanced semiconductor fabrication plants requires multi-billion-dollar investments and can take decades, delaying self-sufficiency.
- **Global Trade Retaliation** — Imposition of tariffs could trigger retaliatory measures from affected nations, exacerbating trade tensions and harming global economic stability.

Way Forward

- Assess the feasibility of phased tariff implementation to balance domestic industry protection with global supply chain stability.

- Strengthen domestic semiconductor R&D and workforce development to reduce long-term reliance on imports.
- Engage in multilateral dialogues with key semiconductor-producing nations (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia) to mitigate trade tensions and ensure supply chain resilience.
- Incentivize private sector investment in semiconductor fabrication through tax breaks, grants, and public-private partnerships.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the semiconductor industry and tariff policies: 1. The United States is a net importer of semiconductors, relying heavily on Asian suppliers for advanced chips. 2. Tariffs on semiconductor imports are primarily intended to reduce the cost of electronic products for domestic consumers. 3. The proposed tariffs by the US administration aim to incentivise domestic semiconductor manufacturing. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: All three — Statements 1 and 3 are correct. The US relies on Asian suppliers for advanced semiconductors, and the proposed tariffs aim to boost domestic production. Statement 2 is incorrect because tariffs are intended to protect domestic industries, not reduce consumer costs.

Q2. Assertion (A): The United States is considering tariff relief for foreign companies investing in domestic semiconductor manufacturing. Reason (R): The primary objective is to reduce the national security risks associated with reliance on foreign semiconductor supply chains. 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

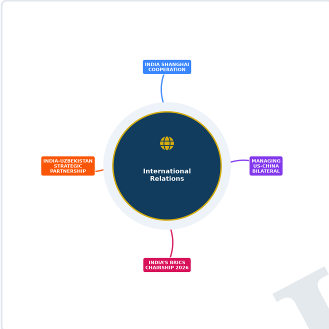
Answer: C — Assertion (A) is true, as the US administration is considering tariff relief for foreign companies investing in domestic semiconductor manufacturing. Reason (R) is also true, as reducing reliance on foreign supply chains is a key objective. However, R is not the correct explanation of A, as the tariff relief is an incentive mechanism, not solely a national security measure.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the rationale behind the United States' recent proposals to impose tariffs on semiconductor imports. How far do these measures align with the objectives of supply chain resilience and national security? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks): Define semiconductors as critical inputs for modern economies and national security. Briefly outline the US proposal to impose tariffs on semiconductor imports and the stated objectives of boosting domestic production and reducing reliance on foreign supply chains.
2. Rationale for Tariffs (4 marks):
• Supply Chain Resilience: Explain how …

International Relations



Section at a glance: International Relations

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS India at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit 2026: Advancing Security, Connectivity, and Opportunity

Mind map: India at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit 20

GS Paper II — International Relations — Regional groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

> ✎ *The SCO is a Eurasian security and economic bloc focused on counter-terrorism, regional stability, and connectivity, with India as a full member since 2017.*

PRELIMS POINTER

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was established in 2001 as a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance, succeeding the Shanghai Five (1996).

Why is this in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-nation visit to Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic underscores India's strategic engagement with Central Asia, with a focus on counter-terrorism, connectivity, and civilisational ties.

Key Points

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was established in 2001 as a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance, succeeding the Shanghai Five (1996). Its founding members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- India became a full member of the SCO in 2017, joining alongside Pakistan, marking a significant expansion of the organisation's geographical and strategic footprint.
- The SCO's primary objectives include promoting regional stability, combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism, enhancing economic cooperation, and fostering people-to-people exchanges.
- The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, serves as the SCO's counter-terrorism arm, facilitating joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing among member states.

- India’s engagement with Central Asia has been guided by the 'Connect Central Asia' policy, launched in 2012, which emphasises energy security, trade, cultural diplomacy, and infrastructure development.
- The SCO Summit 2026 in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, coincides with the 25th anniversary of the organisation, providing an opportunity to assess progress and chart future directions.

What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?

- The SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation established to address security, economic, and cultural challenges in the Eurasian region.
- Its core pillars include political and security cooperation, economic integration, and cultural and humanitarian exchanges, with a strong emphasis on counter-terrorism and regional stability.
- The organisation operates through several mechanisms, including the Heads of State Council (supreme decision-making body), the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS).
- The SCO Secretariat, based in Beijing, serves as the administrative hub, while the Executive Committee of RATS, headquartered in Tashkent, coordinates counter-terrorism efforts.
- Member states include China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with observer states (e.g., Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Mongolia) and dialogue partners (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Sri Lanka).
- The SCO has evolved beyond its initial security-focused mandate to include economic cooperation, such as the SCO

Business Council and the Interbank Consortium, aimed at facilitating trade and investment.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
SCO Membership (2017)	India’s participation since 2017 underscores its commitment to multilateralism in Eurasia, providing a platform to balance influence in Central Asia amid geopolitical shifts.
India’s Vision for SCO	The emphasis on 'Security, Connectivity, and Opportunity' aligns with India’s broader foreign policy goals, integrating economic, digital, and energy cooperation with regional stability.
Bilateral Visits to Uzbekistan & Kyrgyz Republic	State visits to Tashkent and Bishkek facilitate high-level diplomatic engagements, reinforcing strategic partnerships and cultural ties with Central Asian nations.
SCO Summit Participation	The 26th SCO Summit in Bishkek marks 25 years of the organisation, offering India an opportunity to shape the grouping’s future agenda, particularly on counter-terrorism and connectivity.
Cultural Diplomacy: Shastri Memorial & World Nomad Games	Institutional visits (e.g., Shastri Memorial) and participation in cultural events (e.g., World Nomad Games) strengthen people-to-people ties, a key pillar of India’s soft power in the region.

Significance for India

- Enhances India’s strategic footprint in Central Asia, a region critical for energy security, trade routes, and counter-terrorism cooperation.
- Provides a platform to engage with key Eurasian powers (Russia, China, Central Asian states) amid evolving global power dynamics.
- Opportunities to deepen trade and investment ties with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic, particularly in sectors like pharmaceuticals, IT, and renewable energy.
- Potential to advance India’s 'Viksit Bharat' vision through partnerships in digital infrastructure, energy (e.g., solar, hydrocarbons), and agro-processing.
- Strengthens civilisational ties through educational and cultural exchanges, exemplified by visits to Shastri Memorial and Mahatma Gandhi Centre in Tashkent.

Challenges

- **Counter-Terrorism & Extremism** — Persistent threats from terrorism, separatism, and extremism in the region challenge SCO’s collective security framework.
- **Geopolitical Rivalries within SCO** — Competing interests of SCO members (e.g., China’s BRI vs. India’s connectivity initiatives) risk diluting the grouping’s cohesion.
- **Connectivity & Infrastructure Gaps** — Limited overland connectivity between India and Central Asia due to geographical barriers and geopolitical constraints (e.g., Pakistan’s denial of transit routes).

- **Energy Security & Resource Competition** — Central Asia's energy resources (e.g., gas, uranium) are critical for India's energy security but face competition from China and Russia.

Relevance for Prelims

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), Viksit Bharat, Connect Central Asia Policy, World Nomad Games

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): 1. The SCO was established in 2001 with the signing of the Shanghai Convention. 2. India became a full member of the SCO in 2017. 3. The SCO's primary focus is on military alliances and collective security against external threats. 4. The SCO Summit 2026 is being hosted by the Kyrgyz Republic. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only three — Statements 2 and 4 are correct. India became a full member of the SCO in 2017, and the SCO Summit 2026 is being hosted by the Kyrgyz Republic. Statement 1 is incorrect as the SCO was established in 2001 with the signing of the Shanghai Treaty, not the Shanghai Convention. Statement 3 is incorrect as the SCO's focus is broader, including economic cooperation, cultural ties, and counter-terrorism, not solely military alliances.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) serves as a platform for India to engage with Central Asian Republics on issues of terrorism and extremism. Reason (R): The SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) facilitates joint counter-terrorism operations among member states. 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. The SCO provides a platform for India to engage with Central Asian Republics on terrorism and extremism, and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is a key mechanism for joint counter-terrorism operations among member states.

Mains practice question

Critically examine India's evolving role within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with particular reference to its emphasis on counter-terrorism, connectivity, and opportunity. How does this engagement align with India's broader foreign policy objectives in Central Asia? (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks)
• Brief background of the SCO: establishment (2001), membership (including India's accession in 2017), and its objectives (security, economic cooperation, cultural ties).
• India's strategic interests in Central Asia: energy security, counter-terrorism, and regional stability.
2. India's Emphasis on Counter-Terrorism (4 marks)
• India's stance on terrorism within the …

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Managing US-China Bilateral Relations: Diplomacy, Trade Frictions, and Strategic Stability Ahead of the Trump-Xi Summit

Mind map: Managing US-China Bilateral Relations: Diplomacy, Trade

GS Paper II — International Relations: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests • GS Paper III — Economy: Effects of Liberalisation on the Economy, Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth

REMEMBER
US-China relations operate at the intersection of strategic rivalry and economic interdependence, where diplomatic engagement and crisis management mechanisms are critical to preventing escalation.

Why is this in news?

The statement by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, urging both China and the United States to overcome obstacles ahead of an anticipated summit between Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, underscores the persistent challenges in managing one of the world's most consequential bilateral relationships. The call for focusing on positive agenda items, managing differences, and removing interference reflects the ongoing need for structured diplomatic engagement amid recurring trade and strategic tensions.

Key Points

- The US-China relationship is a defining feature of 21st-century geopolitics, characterised by deep economic interdependence and strategic competition.
- The two nations account for approximately 40% of global GDP and are central to global supply chains, technological ecosystems, and climate governance.
- Trade frictions escalated during the 2018–2020 US-China trade war, marked by reciprocal tariffs and non-tariff barriers, which disrupted global trade flows.
- The May 2026 meeting between Trump and Xi in Beijing reaffirmed commitments to stabilise bilateral relations and maintain a 'fragile trade truce', despite ongoing disputes.
- Recent targeted economic measures—such as the US ban on Chinese-made robots and China's restrictions on American entities—highlight the persistence of trade and technological rivalry.
- The proposed September 2026 summit aims to reset dialogue mechanisms and address structural issues in the relationship, including technology transfer, intellectual property, and market access.

What are the key dimensions of US-China bilateral relations?

- Strategic Competition: The US and China compete across military, technological, and ideological domains, with implications for global order and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.

- Economic Interdependence: Despite rivalry, the two economies remain deeply integrated, with bilateral trade exceeding $600 billion annually and significant investments in each other's markets.
- Trade and Investment Barriers: Non-tariff measures, export controls, and investment screening mechanisms (e.g., CFIUS in the US) shape the economic landscape of the relationship.
- Technology and Innovation: Competition in critical and emerging technologies (e.g., semiconductors, AI, 5G) has led to export controls, sanctions, and restrictions on foreign direct investment.
- Diplomatic Channels: High-level summits, strategic dialogues, and working groups serve as primary mechanisms to manage tensions and prevent escalation.
- Multilateral Institutions: Both countries engage in global governance institutions (e.g., WTO, IMF, UN) while pursuing competing visions for international norms and standards.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Diplomatic engagement at the foreign minister level	Demonstrates the institutional mechanism for managing bilateral relations between major powers, even amid tensions.
Anticipated Trump-Xi summit in September 2026	Represents a high-stakes diplomatic engagement aimed at stabilising US-China relations and addressing trade and technological disputes.
Trade and technological restrictions (e.g., US ban on	Highlights the use of economic measures as instruments of strategic competition,

Feature	Significance
Chinese robots, China's restrictions on US entities)	impacting global supply chains and technological sovereignty.
Fragile trade truce maintained since May 2026 meeting	Indicates periodic efforts to de-escalate trade conflicts, though structural divergences persist.
Call to 'overcome obstacles' and 'focus on positive agenda'	Reflects the diplomatic language used to frame negotiations, emphasising mutual benefit while acknowledging differences.

Significance for India

- The summit's outcome could influence global trade flows, particularly in technology-intensive sectors such as robotics, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence.
- Persistent trade restrictions risk disrupting supply chains, increasing costs for industries reliant on cross-border manufacturing and innovation.
- US-China relations remain a cornerstone of global geopolitics, with implications for regional security architectures in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.
- Diplomatic summits serve as confidence-building measures, though their effectiveness depends on follow-through in policy adjustments.
- High-level diplomatic engagements provide a structured platform for addressing disputes, even when underlying tensions persist.

Challenges

- **Trade and Technological Rivalry** — Persistent use of economic measures (e.g., tariffs, bans, restrictions) as tools of strategic competition.

Way Forward

- Facilitate structured dialogues on technology transfer and intellectual property rights to reduce trade barriers.
- Establish clear frameworks for managing economic competition without resorting to unilateral measures.
- Encourage joint research and development initiatives in critical sectors to foster interdependence.
- Strengthen multilateral institutions (e.g., WTO) to address systemic issues in US-China trade relations.

Relevance for Prelims

Trade War · Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Status · Tariff Barriers · Economic Sanctions · Strategic Competition · High-Level Diplomacy · Bilateral Summits

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the mechanisms of economic statecraft in international relations: 1. Economic statecraft refers to the use of economic tools such as tariffs, sanctions, and trade restrictions to achieve foreign policy objectives. 2. The United States banning Chinese-made robots is an example of economic statecraft aimed at addressing national security concerns. 3. China's ban on American entities engaging in trade activities in China is a form of economic statecraft primarily driven by economic retaliation rather than strategic considerations. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: All three — Statements 1 and 2 are correct as they accurately define economic statecraft and provide a valid example. Statement 3 is incorrect because China's ban on American entities is likely driven by both economic retaliation and strategic considerations, including national security and technological sovereignty.

Q2. Assertion (A): High-level diplomatic summits between the leaders of the United States and China are primarily symbolic and do not significantly impact bilateral relations. Reason (R): Such summits often result in the issuance of joint statements or agreements that outline areas of cooperation or conflict resolution, thereby influencing the trajectory of bilateral relations.

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 high-level diplomatic summits between the US and China often have tangible outcomes, such as trade truces or agreements on specific issues, which can significantly impact bilateral relations. Reason (R) is true as these summits frequently produce joint statements or agreements that shape the future of US-China relations.

Mains practice question

The maintenance of stable and constructive relations between the United States and China is critical for global economic stability and geopolitical equilibrium. In this context, critically examine the role of high-level diplomatic summits and economic statecraft in managing US-China bilateral relations. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks): Define high-level diplomatic summits and economic statecraft. State their significance in managing bilateral relations, especially between major powers like the US and China.
2. High-Level Diplomatic Summits (5 marks):
• Explain the purpose of such summits (e.g., confidence-building, conflict resolution, trade agreements).
• Cite the Trump-Xi summit in May …

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India's BRICS Chairship 2026: Institutional Framework, Thematic Priorities, and Strategic Significance in Global Governance

BRICS 2026 Summit Structure

18th BRICS Summit	New Delhi, Sep 12-13
India's 4th Chairship	Theme: Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, Sustainability
BRICS Member States	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
Outreach Invitees	Global leaders
BRICS NDB & CRA	Alternative financing, liquidity support
Global Governance Reform	UNSC, WTO discussions

BRICS 2026 Summit Structure

GS Paper II — International Relations: Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests • GS Paper II — Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests • GS Paper III — Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilisation of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

> ✎ *BRICS is a strategic plurilateral grouping of five major emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) formed to enhance cooperation across political-security, economic-financial...*

Why is this in news?

India is scheduled to host the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 12–13, 2026, under its fourth Chairship of the grouping.

PRELIMS POINTER

BRICS was established in 2006 as an informal grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining in 2010, formalising its current composition of five major emerging economies.

This summit assumes significance as it marks the 20th anniversary of BRICS' establishment and occurs amid ongoing debates over the reform of global governance institutions, including the United Nations Security Council and the World Trade Organization. The event will bring together leaders from BRICS member states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and outreach invitees, to deliberate on resilience, innovation, cooperation, and sustainability in a multipolar world order.

Key Points

- BRICS was established in 2006 as an informal grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining in 2010, formalising its current composition of five major emerging economies.
- The grouping represents over 40% of the global population and contributes approximately 25% of global GDP, making it a significant bloc in global economic and political discourse.
- BRICS has evolved from a purely economic grouping to a platform addressing geopolitical, security, and developmental challenges, including counter-terrorism, climate change, and reform of global financial institutions.
- India has held the BRICS Chairship on three previous occasions (2012, 2016, 2021) and assumed its fourth Chairship on January 1, 2026, under the theme 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability'.
- The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) were established to provide alternative financing mechanisms and liquidity support, reducing dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions.

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is a plurilateral grouping of five major emerging economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—formed to promote political, economic, and strategic cooperation among its members.
- The grouping was formalised in 2009 with the first BRIC (without South Africa) summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, and South Africa joined in 2010, rebranding it as BRICS.
- BRICS operates on three foundational pillars: political and security cooperation, economic and financial collaboration, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges, with annual summits serving as the apex decision-making forum.
- The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), headquartered in Shanghai, was established in 2014 to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in member countries and other emerging economies.
- The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), established in 2014, provides a framework for mutual liquidity support among members to address balance-of-payments pressures, complementing the IMF's role.
- BRICS has expanded its agenda to include global governance reform, climate change mitigation, food and energy security, counter-terrorism, digital economy, and reform of multilateral institutions like the WTO and UN.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
BRICS Chairship Theme: 'Building for Resilience,	Reflects India's emphasis on sustainable development, technological collaboration, and

Feature	Significance
Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability'	inclusive growth, aligning with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement.
Bharat Mandapam as Host Venue	Symbolises India's infrastructural capabilities and commitment to hosting high-profile international summits, enhancing its soft power and diplomatic influence.
350+ Meetings Across 25 Cities	Demonstrates India's extensive preparatory efforts to foster multi-stakeholder engagement, including government, business, academia, and civil society, under the BRICS framework.
Integration of Partner Countries	Expands BRICS' outreach to 10 partner nations, broadening the coalition's agenda to include diverse regional perspectives on global challenges.
BRICS Logo Design: 'Namaste' Gesture	Cultural representation that underscores India's diplomatic ethos of inclusivity, respect, and collaborative spirit in international relations.

Significance for India

- Facilitates discussions on reforming the international financial architecture, including the role of BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) in mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

- Explores mechanisms to reduce dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions, promoting alternative payment systems and de-dollarisation efforts.
- Provides a platform for dialogue on counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and regional stability, particularly in the context of BRICS' expanding membership and geopolitical influence.
- Enhances intra-BRICS coordination on issues such as maritime security, non-proliferation, and conflict resolution in line with the UN Charter principles.
- Promotes collaboration on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, and green energy, positioning BRICS as a hub for innovation-driven growth.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the BRICS grouping: 1. BRICS was established in 2006 with five original members. 2. India has held the BRICS Chairship four times, including in 2026. 3. The 18th BRICS Summit in 2026 will be hosted in New Delhi. 4. BRICS currently has 11 member countries. 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 3 are correct. Statement 4 is incorrect as BRICS has 11 member countries in 2026, but it was not established in 2006 (it was established in 2009).

Q2. Assertion (A): The BRICS grouping primarily focuses on economic cooperation and trade among its members. Reason (R):

The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) was established to provide financial assistance for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in member countries. 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 (A) and Reason (R) are true. While BRICS does emphasize economic cooperation, the establishment of the NDB is a concrete institutional mechanism to support this goal, making R the correct explanation of A.

Mains practice question

India’s BRICS Chairship in 2026 is guided by the theme 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability'. Critically examine the significance of this theme in the context of India’s evolving role in global governance. Also, assess how BRICS can serve as a platform for advancing India’s strategic interests in the contemporary multipolar world. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks):
• Briefly define BRICS as a plurilateral grouping of major emerging economies.
• Highlight India’s founding membership and its fourth Chairship in 2026.
• State the theme’s alignment with India’s foreign policy priorities (e.g., strategic autonomy, multipolarity, and South-South cooperation).
2. Significance of the Theme (5 marks):
• Resilience: ...

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership: Deepening Bilateral Ties in Trade, Energy, and Cultural Diplomacy

3D cutaway: PM Modi arrives in Tashkent for 2-day state visit to strengthen bilateral ties

GS Paper II — International Relations — India's Foreign Policy, Regional Cooperation in Central Asia, and Multilateral Organisations (SCO)

Why is this in news?

REMEMBER
The India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership, elevated in 2011, focuses on trade diversification, energy security, digital connectivity, defence cooperation, and cultural diplomacy, with SCO serving as a key multilateral…

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day state visit to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from August 29–30, 2026, marks a significant diplomatic engagement aimed at reinforcing the India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership. This visit, the Prime Minister's fourth to the country, underscores the growing momentum in bilateral cooperation across trade, investment, digital connectivity, defence, and energy, while also aligning with India's vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and Uzbekistan's 'Yangi Uzbekistan 2030'. The visit includes delegation-level talks with President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, cultural engagements at the Shastri Memorial and Mahatma Gandhi Centre, and participation in the 26th SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Key Points

- India and Uzbekistan share historical and civilisational ties dating back to the ancient Silk Road, with cultural and people-to-people exchanges forming the bedrock of their relationship.
- The bilateral relationship was elevated to a 'Strategic Partnership' in 2011, reflecting a shared commitment to deepening cooperation in trade, defence, energy, and connectivity.
- Uzbekistan is a key partner in India's 'Connect Central Asia' policy, launched in 2012 to enhance engagement with Central Asian nations through trade, energy, and cultural diplomacy.
- The two countries have maintained high-level exchanges, including the Uzbek President's state visit to India in 2018 and India's participation in the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in 2019.
- Economic cooperation has expanded, with bilateral trade reaching USD 700 million in 2023, though significant potential remains untapped, particularly in energy and pharmaceuticals.

India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership: Key Pillars and Objectives

- Historical and Civilisational Bonds: India and Uzbekistan share deep historical ties, rooted in the ancient Silk Road, with cultural exchanges including the spread of Buddhism and

Persian influences. Modern ties are strengthened by shared values of peace, sovereignty, and mutual respect.

- Strategic Partnership Framework: Established in 2011, the Strategic Partnership encompasses cooperation in trade, investment, defence, energy, education, and cultural diplomacy, with regular high-level engagements and institutional mechanisms.
- Economic Cooperation: Bilateral trade, though modest at USD 700 million (2023), is diversifying beyond traditional sectors. Key areas include pharmaceuticals, IT services, agriculture, and renewable energy. Uzbekistan's lithium reserves and India's expertise in pharmaceuticals present opportunities for collaboration.
- Energy Security: Uzbekistan is a significant producer of natural gas, and India seeks to diversify its energy imports to ensure energy security. Joint ventures in oil and gas exploration, as well as renewable energy projects, are under discussion.
- Digital Connectivity and Infrastructure: India's expertise in digital public infrastructure (e.g., UPI, Aadhaar) and Uzbekistan's focus on digital transformation offer avenues for collaboration in fintech, e-governance, and IT-enabled services.
- Defence and Security Cooperation: Defence ties have strengthened, with joint military exercises, training programmes, and defence industry collaborations. Counter-terrorism and regional security are key areas of convergence, particularly in the context of SCO's anti-terrorism framework.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
State Visit by PM Modi to Uzbekistan	Demonstrates high-level diplomatic engagement, signalling strategic priority of Central Asia in India's foreign policy, particularly in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) framework.
Delegation-Level Talks with Uzbek President	Provides a platform for structured negotiations on bilateral cooperation, trade, investment, and regional security, reinforcing institutionalised diplomatic dialogue.
Focus on Trade, Investment, and Digital Connectivity	Aligns with India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision and Uzbekistan's 'Yangi Uzbekistan 2030' plan, fostering economic integration and technological collaboration.
Cultural Diplomacy: Visit to Shastri Memorial and Mahatma Gandhi Centre	Reinforces people-to-people ties, historical linkages, and soft power diplomacy, highlighting shared cultural heritage.
Participation in 26th SCO Summit in Bishkek	Demonstrates India's active engagement in multilateral institutions, particularly in counter-terrorism, regional connectivity, and economic cooperation.

Significance for India

- Strengthening trade and investment ties with Uzbekistan, a key Central Asian economy, to diversify India's energy and mineral imports (e.g., uranium, cotton, and pharmaceuticals).

- Promoting digital connectivity initiatives, including IT partnerships, e-governance collaborations, and fintech exchanges to enhance bilateral digital infrastructure.
- Advancing counter-terrorism and extremism cooperation under the SCO framework, given the shared threat perception in the region.
- Exploring defence and military-to-military engagements, including joint exercises, training programmes, and defence industrial collaboration.
- Reinforcing India's commitment to the SCO, a platform for addressing regional security, economic cooperation, and connectivity challenges.

Challenges

- **Geopolitical and Regional Instability** — Navigating the complex geopolitical landscape in Central Asia, including the influence of external powers and regional conflicts.
- **Economic Integration and Trade Barriers** — Overcoming non-tariff barriers and regulatory hurdles in bilateral trade, including customs procedures and standards compliance.
- **Digital and Technological Divide** — Bridging the digital divide between India and Uzbekistan, particularly in areas such as e-governance, fintech, and digital infrastructure.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers** — Addressing language and cultural differences to foster effective people-to-people exchanges and academic collaborations.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India’s relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs): 1. India is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which includes several CARs. 2. The Prime Minister of India recently visited Uzbekistan for a State Visit to strengthen bilateral ties. 3. The CARs are located in South Asia and are primarily maritime nations. 4. India's 'Act East Policy' includes engagement with the CARs as part of its broader strategic outreach. 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 the CARs are landlocked nations in Central Asia, not South Asia. Statement 1 is correct because India is a member of the SCO, which includes Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Statement 2 is correct as the Prime Minister visited Uzbekistan for a State Visit. Statement 4 is correct as the Act East Policy includes engagement with Central Asia.

Q2. Assertion (A): India's strategic partnership with Uzbekistan focuses on trade, digital connectivity, defence, and energy. Reason (R): The partnership aligns with Uzbekistan's 'Yangi Uzbekistan 2030' vision and India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' goals. 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. The strategic partnership between India and Uzbekistan indeed focuses on trade, digital connectivity, defence, and energy. Additionally, the partnership aligns with Uzbekistan's 'Yangi Uzbekistan 2030' vision and India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' goals, making R the correct explanation of A.

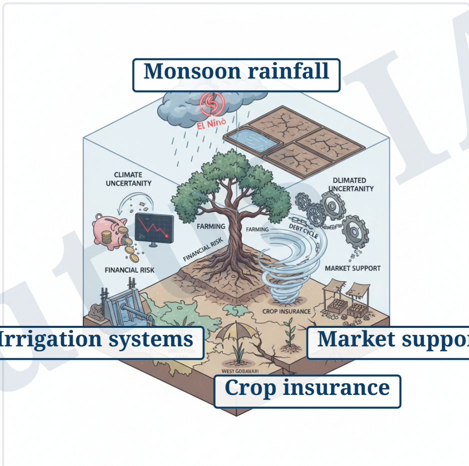
Mains practice question

Critically examine the evolving strategic partnership between India and Uzbekistan, highlighting its significance in the context of India's broader engagement with the Central Asian Republics (CARs). Also, discuss how this partnership aligns with India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and Uzbekistan's 'Yangi Uzbekistan 2030' visions. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks): Define the strategic partnership between India and Uzbekistan, contextualising it within India's broader engagement with CARs. Mention the historical background of India-CARs relations, including the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and India's Act East Policy.
2. Key Areas of Cooperation (5 marks):
• Trade and Investment: Discuss …

Environment

ENVIRONMENT Climate-Induced Agrarian Distress in Andhra Pradesh: Intersecting Water Scarcity, Financial Vulnerability, and Policy Gaps



3D cutaway: Andhra Pradesh farmers caught between climate uncertainty and financial risk

GS Paper III — Agriculture, Issues Related to Farmers, Food Security, and Environmental Degradation • GS Paper III — Effects of Liberalization, Globalization, and Privatization on Agriculture

> ✎ *The agrarian crisis in Andhra Pradesh exemplifies the interplay between climate variability, unsustainable resource use, and policy gaps, necessitating integrated solutions in water management...*

PRELIMS POINTER

Why is this in news?

The 2026 monsoon deficit in Andhra Pradesh, exacerbated by El Niño, has intensified water scarcity, delayed sowing, and escalated cultivation costs, pushing farmers into a cycle of debt and financial risk. This crisis underscores the systemic vulnerabilities in India's agrarian economy, where climate variability intersects with policy gaps in irrigation, crop insurance, and market support, necessitating a re-evaluation of agricultural resilience strategies.

Key Points

- Andhra Pradesh, a key agricultural state, relies heavily on monsoon rainfall for kharif sowing, with paddy being a dominant crop in deltaic regions like West Godavari and Krishna Delta.
- The 2026 monsoon season has been marked by severe deficits due to a strong El Niño event, leading to delayed or erratic rainfall and prolonged dry spells across the state.
- Farmers in Bapatla district, for instance, are resorting to ad-hoc measures such as laying temporary PVC pipelines to draw distant groundwater, reflecting the desperation induced by surface water scarcity.
- The financial burden on farmers has been compounded by rising input costs, including diesel for pumps, fertilizers, and labor, alongside stagnant or volatile market prices for agricultural produce.

Andhra Pradesh, a key agricultural state, relies heavily on monsoon rainfall for kharif sowing, with paddy being a dominant crop in deltaic regions like West Godavari and Krishna Delta.

- Historically, Andhra Pradesh has faced recurring droughts and water conflicts, particularly in the Rayalaseema and coastal regions, highlighting structural challenges in water resource management.
- The state's agrarian crisis is not isolated but part of a broader national trend, where climate change, groundwater depletion, and policy inefficiencies converge to threaten food security and rural livelihoods.

Understanding the Agrarian Crisis in Andhra Pradesh: Key Dimensions

- Climate Variability and Water Scarcity: The 2026 monsoon deficit, driven by El Niño, has exacerbated pre-existing water stress in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in rainfed and deltaic regions. This has disrupted traditional sowing cycles and reduced soil moisture availability for kharif crops.
- Groundwater Depletion and Over-Extraction: Intensive agriculture, particularly paddy cultivation in deltaic districts, has led to unsustainable groundwater extraction. Farmers are increasingly reliant on diesel-powered pumps to access deeper aquifers, escalating costs and environmental degradation.
- Financial Vulnerability and Debt Traps: Rising input costs, coupled with delayed or failed harvests, have pushed farmers into debt cycles. The lack of timely financial support or alternative income sources exacerbates their vulnerability to climate shocks.
- Policy Gaps in Irrigation and Crop Insurance: While schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) aim to improve water-use efficiency, implementation gaps persist. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

faces challenges in timely claim settlements and coverage adequacy.

- Market Instability and Price Volatility: Farmers face uncertainty not only in production but also in post-harvest outcomes, with price fluctuations for crops like paddy and pulses affecting their income stability.
- Agricultural Diversification Challenges: The dominance of water-intensive crops like paddy in deltaic regions limits the scope for diversification toward drought-resistant or low-water crops, despite policy incentives for crop diversification.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
El Niño-induced monsoon deficits	Disrupts seasonal rainfall patterns, leading to delayed or deficient precipitation critical for kharif sowing in Andhra Pradesh.
Groundwater depletion in Krishna Delta	Excessive extraction for irrigation reduces water tables, increasing dependency on diesel-powered pumps and escalating cultivation costs.
Delayed crop coverage	Reduces the window for sowing, forcing farmers to adopt short-duration or drought-resistant crops with lower yield potential.
Rising input costs	Increases financial burden on farmers, exacerbating debt cycles and reducing resilience to climate shocks.
Financial survival strategies	Farmers resort to borrowing, temporary irrigation infrastructure (e.g., PVC pipelines), or abandoning cultivation, risking long-term livelihoods.

Significance for India

- Agriculture contributes ~30% to Andhra Pradesh's GSDP, making climate-induced disruptions a macroeconomic concern affecting rural incomes and state revenue.
- Financial distress among farmers triggers multiplier effects in rural economies, impacting allied sectors like agro-processing, transport, and local trade.
- Climate uncertainty exacerbates rural-urban migration, straining urban infrastructure and altering demographic patterns in Andhra Pradesh.
- Marginal and small farmers face disproportionate risks, deepening socio-economic inequalities within agrarian communities.
- Over-extraction of groundwater for irrigation depletes aquifers, leading to long-term ecological degradation and land subsidence.

Way Forward

- Strengthen early warning systems for monsoon variability and droughts using satellite data and AI-driven analytics.
- Expand coverage of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices, including drought-resistant crop varieties and water-efficient irrigation (e.g., drip irrigation).
- Enhance implementation of PMFBY by addressing claim settlement delays, improving transparency, and integrating weather-based triggers.
- Revitalize irrigation infrastructure through public-private partnerships, focusing on maintenance of canals, tanks, and groundwater recharge structures.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the impact of El Niño on Indian agriculture: 1. El Niño events are associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall in India. 2. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) declares an El Niño year based on sea surface temperature anomalies in the Pacific Ocean. 3. El Niño directly causes drought conditions in all regions of India uniformly. 4. The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) provides financial assistance to farmers during El Niño-induced droughts. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only three — Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect as El Niño's impact varies regionally. Statement 4 is incorrect as NAFED is not the nodal agency for drought relief; the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and state governments handle such assistance.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) aims to provide financial support to farmers in the event of crop failure due to natural calamities. Reason (R): PMFBY is implemented through a premium subsidy model where the central and state governments share the premium burden equally. 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 — A is true as PMFBY provides financial support for crop failure due to natural calamities. R is false because the premium subsidy under PMFBY is shared by the central government (50%), state government (25%), and farmers (25%) in most cases, except for certain crops and regions.

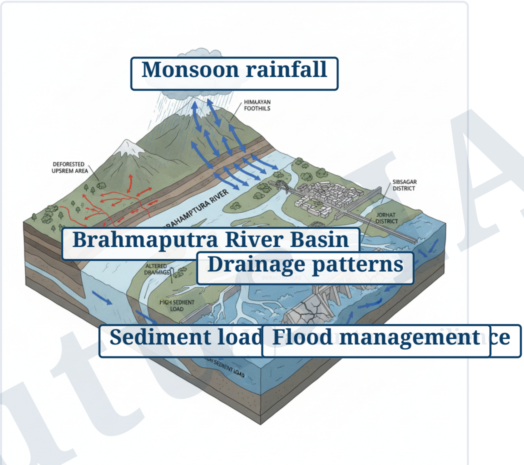
Mains practice question

Critically examine the institutional and policy frameworks available in India to mitigate agricultural distress arising from climate variability and water scarcity. In your answer, assess the effectiveness of these frameworks in addressing the challenges faced by farmers in states like Andhra Pradesh. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Institutional Frameworks:
• National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA): Role in drought management and relief coordination.
• State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs): Extension services for climate-resilient agriculture.
• National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED): Role in procurement and price stabilization.
2. Policy Frameworks:
• Pradhan Mantri Fasal …

ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change and Hydrological Extremes: Analysing the Paradox of Reduced Monsoon Rainfall with Increased Flooding in Assam



3D cutaway: Assam climate warning

GS Paper III — Environment, Disaster Management, and Climate Change • GS Paper III — Disaster and Disaster Management • GS Paper I — Geography of India (Floods and Drainage Systems)

Why is this in news?

The paradoxical occurrence of severe flooding in Assam during the 2025 monsoon season, despite deficient rainfall, underscores the evolving nature of hydrological extremes under

REMEMBER

The 2025 Assam floods highlight that climate change is altering the hydrological cycle, making traditional flood management approaches inadequate; resilience-building must prioritise upstream rainfall variability...

climate change. The event highlights the critical role of upstream rainfall intensity, altered drainage patterns, and inadequate infrastructure resilience in amplifying flood risks, necessitating a re-evaluation of traditional flood management strategies.

Key Points

- The Brahmaputra River Basin, shared by India, China, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, is one of the most flood-prone regions globally due to its unique topography, high sediment load, and monsoon dynamics.
- Historically, Assam has experienced recurrent floods, but the nature of these events has shifted from gradual inundation to sudden, deep flooding, particularly in districts like Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, and Golaghat.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events globally, with South Asia identified as a hotspot for such changes.
- Assam's flood risk is exacerbated by its geomorphological features, including the Brahmaputra's braided channel system, high erosion rates, and the presence of numerous tributaries that respond rapidly to upstream rainfall.
- The state's flood management infrastructure, primarily embankments, has been criticised for its structural inadequacies, maintenance gaps, and failure to account for climate-induced changes in hydrological patterns.
- The economic and social costs of floods in Assam are substantial, with ₹27,925 crore in recorded damages between 2015 and 2024, excluding unquantified private losses such as livelihood disruptions and health impacts.

Understanding the Paradox: Reduced Monsoon Rainfall with Increased Flooding

- The 2025 Assam floods exemplify a climate-induced paradox where deficient monsoon rainfall (nearly 33% below normal) coexists with unprecedented flooding, driven by extreme upstream rainfall events in neighbouring regions like Nagaland.
- Flash floods, characterised by rapid water surges, are becoming more frequent due to the intensification of short-duration, high-intensity rainfall, which overwhelms local drainage systems and soil absorption capacities.
- The Brahmaputra's tributaries, particularly those originating in hilly terrains like the Naga Hills, act as conduits for floodwaters, transmitting upstream rainfall impacts to downstream plains within hours.
- Shallow flooding, historically common in Assam, is being replaced by deep flooding, which submerges entire settlements, destroys infrastructure, and disrupts livelihoods, particularly in agricultural and rural communities.
- Climate projections indicate that Assam's flood-prone area could expand from 32,000 km^2 (1980–2000) to 50,000–60,000 km^2 by mid-century, with the share of deep flooding exposure rising from 36% to 50–60%.
- The IPCC's Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) suggest that flood risk in Assam until 2050 is largely determined by existing global warming trends, making immediate adaptation measures critical regardless of future emissions trajectories.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
Deficient monsoon rainfall in Assam (July 2025)	Despite below-normal rainfall, Assam experienced unprecedented flooding, indicating a shift in monsoon dynamics and flood triggers.
Flash flooding in Upper Assam districts (Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Golaghat)	Sudden, deep flooding caused severe damage to homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods, disrupting traditional coping mechanisms.
Extreme rainfall in upstream Nagaland (19 July 2025)	Heavy rainfall in Mokokchung (500% above normal) triggered rapid water flow into Assam's tributaries, leading to downstream flooding.
Expansion of flood-risk zones (1980–2050 projections)	Flood-prone area in Assam may expand from 32,000 km² to 50,000–60,000 km² by mid-century due to climate change.
Increase in deep flooding exposure (36% to 50–60%)	Deep flooding, unlike shallow flooding, destroys homes and infrastructure, posing a greater adaptation challenge for communities.

Significance for India

- Demonstrates that climate change is altering monsoon patterns, leading to paradoxical events where deficient rainfall coincides with extreme flooding due to upstream rainfall intensity.

- Highlights the need for climate-resilient infrastructure and early warning systems to mitigate sudden flood surges driven by extreme weather events.
- Emphasises the role of upstream rainfall in downstream flood risks, particularly in river basins like the Brahmaputra, where water from Nagaland rapidly inundates Assam.
- Shows how topography and tributary dynamics exacerbate flood impacts in traditionally low-risk areas, necessitating basin-wide flood management strategies.
- Floods and landslides in Assam caused ₹27,925 crore in documented damages (2015–2024), with private and social costs likely far higher.

Way Forward

- Enhance real-time flood monitoring and early warning systems to provide timely alerts for at-risk communities.
- Redesign and reinforce embankments, drainage systems, and critical infrastructure to withstand deep flooding and rapid water surges.
- Develop climate-resilient housing and livelihood strategies for vulnerable populations, particularly in flood-prone areas.
- Integrate climate risk assessments into long-term infrastructure and urban planning to reduce future vulnerabilities.

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Brahmaputra river system and flooding in Assam: 1. The recent flooding in Upper Assam was primarily caused by excessive rainfall within the state itself. 2. The Brahmaputra's southern tributaries receive water from extreme rainfall events in Nagaland. 3. Assam's flood risk is projected to decrease by 2050 due to global mitigation efforts. 4. Deep flooding in Assam is defined as water levels exceeding 3 metres above normal. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is incorrect: the flooding was triggered by extreme rainfall in Nagaland, not within Assam. Statement 2 is correct: water from Nagaland's heavy rainfall entered Assam via southern tributaries. Statement 3 is incorrect: flood risk is projected to increase regardless of mitigation efforts until 2050. Statement 4 is incorrect: deep flooding is not defined by a fixed threshold but by its destructive impact on homes and livelihoods.

Q2. Assertion (A): The Brahmaputra basin's flood dynamics are influenced by upstream rainfall in regions like Nagaland. Reason (R): The Brahmaputra's southern tributaries originate in hilly terrains where extreme rainfall events can rapidly increase downstream discharge. 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 correct. The Brahmaputra's southern tributaries (e.g., Dikhow, Jhanji) originate in hilly regions of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, where extreme rainfall events can cause flash floods that rapidly propagate downstream into Assam.

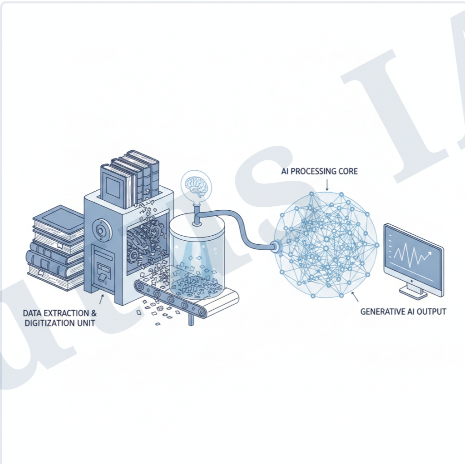
Mains practice question

The paradox of reduced monsoon rainfall coinciding with unprecedented flooding in Assam underscores the inadequacy of traditional flood management strategies in the face of climate change. Critically analyse the hydrological and climatic factors driving this phenomenon, and outline a multi-dimensional framework for building climate resilience in Assam's flood-prone districts. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Hydrological and Climatic Drivers (6 marks)
• Explain the role of extreme rainfall events in upstream regions (e.g., Nagaland) and their rapid propagation through the Brahmaputra's southern tributaries.
• Discuss the concept of 'flash floods' and their distinction from gradual monsoon flooding.
• Highlight the impact of climate change on rainfall intensity ...

Science & Technology

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



3D cutaway: Books are being destroyed for training AI

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

> ✎ *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...*

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.

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

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.

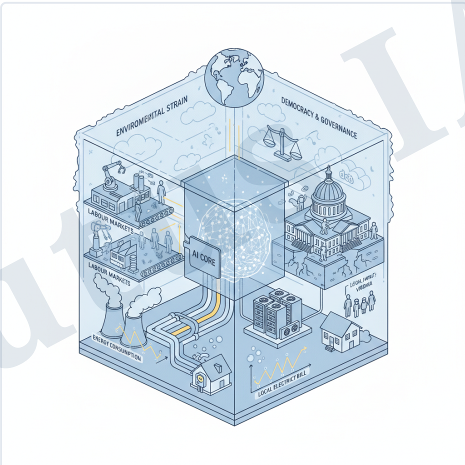
Mains practice question

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: ...

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY Artificial Intelligence and the Evolving Social Contract: Implications for Democratic Governance and Economic Equity



3D cutaway: THE AI CURSE

GS Paper II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice • GS Paper III — Science and Technology, Economic Development, Environment

Why is this in news?

The article highlights the growing concerns surrounding the socio-economic and political implications of artificial

REMEMBER
AI's energy-intensive infrastructure and automation capabilities may disrupt the traditional social contract by reducing elites' dependence on broad-based citizen participation, necessitating new frameworks for economic...

intelligence (AI) deployment, particularly its impact on energy consumption, labour markets, and the foundational bargain of modern democracy. The case of a family's doubled electricity bill due to an AI data centre in northern Virginia underscores the tangible effects of AI infrastructure on local communities, raising questions about equity, governance, and the sustainability of the social contract in an era of rapid technological advancement.

Key Points

- AI systems, particularly large-scale data centres, require substantial energy inputs, often leading to increased local electricity costs and environmental strain, as seen in the reported doubling of a family's electricity bill in northern Virginia.
- The deployment of AI infrastructure is concentrated in specific regions, creating disparities in economic benefits and environmental burdens, which may exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities.
- Historically, the social contract in democracies has relied on interdependence between elites and ordinary citizens, where the latter's labour, taxes, and participation were essential for the functioning of the state and economy.
- The industrial revolution introduced new dependencies, such as the need for mass consumption to sustain mass production, as exemplified by Henry Ford's five-dollar day, which tied wages to productivity.
- Modern warfare and industrial processes have increasingly relied on automation and professionalised labour, reducing the dependence of elites on broad-based citizen participation.
- The rise of AI introduces a potential shift in this dynamic, where automation may reduce the necessity of human labour

in certain sectors, altering the traditional bargain between citizens and the state.

What is the relationship between Artificial Intelligence, Economic Dependence, and Democratic Governance?

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines, enabling them to perform tasks such as data analysis, decision-making, and automation, often with minimal human intervention.
- AI systems, particularly those used in data centres, consume vast amounts of energy, leading to increased operational costs for local communities and potential environmental degradation, as highlighted by the case of doubled electricity bills in northern Virginia.
- The deployment of AI infrastructure is often concentrated in specific regions, creating economic disparities where benefits accrue to a narrow segment of society while costs are borne by local communities, raising questions of distributive justice.
- Historically, democratic governance has relied on the interdependence between elites and ordinary citizens, where the latter's labour, taxes, and participation were essential for the functioning of the state and economy, as seen in the industrial era.
- The social contract in democracies has evolved to include protections for workers, such as labour rights, social security, and public health measures, which were necessary to maintain stability and legitimacy.
- The rise of AI introduces a potential shift in this dynamic, where automation may reduce the necessity of human labour in certain sectors, altering the traditional bargain between citizens and the state.

Relevance for Prelims

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Divide, Data Centres, Energy Consumption, Automation, Universal Basic Income (UBI), Digital Public Infrastructure, Labour Market Disruptions, Environmental Sustainability, Constitutional Governance

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the political implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in contemporary governance: 1. AI-driven automation may reduce the economic dependence of elites on ordinary citizens. 2. The social contract in modern democracies is solely based on constitutional provisions and electoral processes. 3. Historically, elites have accepted limits on their power due to material dependencies such as the need for recruits, taxes, and mass consumption. How many of the above statements are correct?

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

Answer: Only two — Statement 1 is correct as AI may reduce the need for human labour, thereby altering economic dependencies. Statement 2 is incorrect because the social contract also relies on material and political dependencies beyond constitutional provisions. Statement 3 is correct as historical evidence shows that elites accepted limits due to material dependencies like taxes and mass consumption.

Q2. Assertion (A): The rise of AI and automation threatens to weaken the democratic bargain by reducing the economic reliance of elites on ordinary citizens. Reason (R): AI-driven data centres and automated production systems can operate with minimal human intervention, thereby diminishing the necessity for mass labour participation in the economy. In the context of the above two 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: Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A. — Assertion (A) is true as AI can reduce economic reliance on ordinary citizens. Reason (R) is also true and correctly explains (A) because AI-driven systems can operate with minimal human intervention, thereby diminishing the need for mass labour participation.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the proposition that Artificial Intelligence (AI) disrupts the traditional social contract between the state and citizens by reducing the economic dependence of elites on ordinary people. Substantiate your analysis with reference to historical precedents and contemporary governance challenges. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Introduction (2 marks): Define the social contract and its historical evolution, particularly the role of material dependencies (e.g., taxes, mass consumption, military service) in shaping the bargain between elites and ordinary citizens.
2. Historical Precedents (3 marks):

• Industrial Revolution: Henry Ford's $5-day wage (1914) as a recognition that mass production required …

General Studies

GENERAL STUDIES Evolution of Indian Customs: From Revenue Collection to Trade Facilitation through Digital Transformation and Global Trade Agreements

3D cutaway: Customs transitioned from duty collector to trade facilitator, says official

GS Paper II — International Relations • GS Paper III — Economy

✎ *The Indian Customs Department has evolved from a revenue-focused authority to a trade facilitator through digitalisation (e-way bill, e-sealing) and adoption of international instruments (ATA Carnet...*

PRELIMS POINTER

The Indian Customs Department, historically structured as a revenue-collecting authority, has undergone significant reform to align with global best practices in trade facilitation.

Why is this in news?

The news highlights the transformation of the Indian Customs Department from a traditional duty-collecting agency into a facilitator of global trade, as articulated by the Additional Commissioner of Customs, Hyderabad, during an export awareness workshop organised by FICCI in Warangal. The shift is underpinned by digitalisation, including e-sealing and e-way bill systems, and the promotion of international trade instruments such as the ATA Carnet and UN TIR Convention, reflecting broader reforms aimed at enhancing trade efficiency and transparency.

Key Points

- The Indian Customs Department, historically structured as a revenue-collecting authority, has undergone significant reform to align with global best practices in trade facilitation.
- Post-liberalisation, India's trade policy has emphasised reducing transaction costs and improving ease of doing business to enhance competitiveness in global markets.
- The World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), ratified by India in 2016, mandates simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures to reduce trade barriers.
- Digital initiatives such as the Indian Customs Electronic Gateway (ICEGATE) and the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) 2017-2020 have been instrumental in modernising customs operations.

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, implemented in 2017, integrated customs duty collection with indirect tax administration, streamlining processes at the border.
- India's participation in international trade facilitation instruments like the ATA Carnet and UN TIR Convention demonstrates its commitment to reducing procedural complexities in cross-border trade.

What is the transformation of Indian Customs from a duty collector to a trade facilitator?

- Customs reform in India has shifted the institutional mandate from mere revenue collection to enabling seamless trade flows, reducing clearance times, and minimising bureaucratic interference.
- Digitalisation of customs processes includes the implementation of the e-way bill system for container movement, which ensures real-time tracking and transparency, reducing opportunities for malpractice and expediting clearances.
- The e-sealing process employs tamper-evident technology to secure consignments during transit, enhancing security and trust in cross-border trade.
- The ATA Carnet is an international customs document that allows duty-free and tax-free temporary import of goods for up to one year across multiple countries, primarily for professional equipment and exhibition items.
- The United Nations TIR Convention facilitates the secure and efficient transit of goods across international borders with minimal customs inspections at intermediate points, reducing delays and costs for traders.

- Round-the-clock customs operations, as highlighted in Hyderabad, address logistical bottlenecks and support exporters in resolving real-time issues, particularly in regions with untapped export potential.

Value addition

Feature	Significance
e-sealing process	Enhances container security by enabling tamper-proof, real-time monitoring of goods, reducing pilferage and expediting clearance.
e-way bill system for container movement	Digitises transit documentation, ensuring seamless inter-state and international movement with automated compliance checks.
Round-the-clock Customs operations	Minimises delays in clearance and dispute resolution, enabling exporters to meet tight international shipment deadlines.
ATA Carnet system	Facilitates duty-free temporary import of goods for exhibitions and professional equipment across multiple countries under a single document.
UN TIR system	Simplifies cross-border transit by eliminating repetitive customs inspections at intermediate points, reducing transit time and costs.

Significance for India

- Reduces transaction costs and time for exporters, enhancing India’s global competitiveness in merchandise trade.
- Encourages participation in international trade fairs and exhibitions by simplifying temporary import procedures.

- Demonstrates the Customs Department's shift from a regulatory enforcement agency to a trade-enabling partner.
- Showcases the integration of digital governance tools (e.g., e-sealing, e-way bills) in border management.
- Aligns with India's 'Ease of Doing Business' reforms, particularly in trade logistics and border clearance efficiency.

Challenges

- **Digital Divide and Infrastructure Gaps** — Uneven adoption of digital tools across customs zones may create disparities in clearance efficiency.
- **Regulatory Harmonisation** — Inconsistencies between central and state-level regulations can lead to delays despite digital reforms.
- **Trade Security vs. Facilitation Trade-off** — Balancing zero-interference clearance with robust risk management to prevent smuggling or misdeclaration.
- **Capacity Building for Exporters** — Limited awareness among exporters, particularly MSMEs, about schemes like ATA Carnet and UN TIR.

Way Forward

- Expand digital infrastructure in customs zones lagging in adoption, prioritising MSME clusters.
- Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns in regional languages to demystify ATA Carnet and UN TIR systems.
- Strengthen inter-state coordination mechanisms to harmonise transit and documentation rules.
- Invest in AI-driven risk assessment tools to balance facilitation with stringent anti-smuggling measures.

Relevance for Prelims

Customs duty · e-way bill · ATA Carnet · UN TIR Convention · FICCI · CESTAT · export promotion · containerisation

Prelims practice questions

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the ATA Carnet system: 1. It is a customs document that allows duty-free temporary import of goods for up to one year. 2. It is issued by the World Customs Organization (WCO). 3. It is primarily used for commercial goods intended for sale in the importing country. 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: ATA Carnet allows duty-free temporary import for up to one year but is not for sale in the importing country. Statement 2 is incorrect: ATA Carnet is issued by national customs authorities, not WCO. Statement 3 is incorrect: It is used for goods intended for exhibition, professional equipment, or demonstration, not commercial sale.

Q2. Assertion (A): The e-way bill system under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime is designed to replace the e-sealing process in Customs operations. Reason (R): The e-way bill system ensures real-time tracking of goods movement, thereby enhancing transparency and reducing transit delays. 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: The e-way bill system under GST is distinct from the e-sealing process in Customs, which is used for container integrity and tamper-proofing. Reason (R) is true: The e-way bill system ensures real-time tracking and transparency in goods movement.

Mains practice question

Critically examine the role of the Customs Department in India's trade facilitation architecture. How has the transition from a duty collector to a trade facilitator been conceptualised and operationalised? Also, analyse the challenges in achieving a truly frictionless trade environment. (15 Marks)

Suggested approach: MODEL-ANSWER SKELETON:
1. Conceptual Framework of Trade Facilitation by Customs
• Define trade facilitation (WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, 2017) and its objectives: predictability, transparency, and efficiency in cross-border trade.
• Role of Customs as a regulatory facilitator under the Customs Act, 1962 and the CBIC's 'Customs to Business Partnership' model.
• Reference to the World …

Monthly Test — Current Affairs

Objective

1. **Consider the following statements regarding the Supreme Court's role in interpreting reservation policies for OBCs in civil service recruitment: 1. The Supreme Court has agreed to consider setting up a special Bench to clarify the applicability of its 2026 judgment on OBC creamy-layer criteria. 2. The judgment pertains to the exclusion of the creamy layer from OBC reservation benefits. 3. The plea seeks to extend the applicability of the judgment to all future recruitments without exception. How many of the above statements are correct?**
   - **(A)** Only one statement is correct
   - **(B)** Only two statements are correct
   - **(C)** All three statements are correct
   - **(D)** None of the statements are correct

2. **Assertion (A): The Supreme Court's scrutiny of ethanol blending in petrol involves legal and policy dimensions related to public interest litigation. Reason (R): The PIL seeks mandatory labelling of ethanol content at petrol pumps and vehicle-wise compatibility databases. 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.**

3. **Match the following constitutional provisions with their correct descriptions: List-I (Provisions) A. Article 243M B. Article 324 C. Article 326 D. Article 327 List-II (Descriptions) 1.**

Empowers the Election Commission to supervise, direct, and control elections. 2. Provides for delimitation of constituencies for local bodies in Scheduled Areas. 3. Grants universal adult suffrage for elections to the House of the People. 4. Empowers Parliament to make laws relating to elections to Legislatures. Options: 1. A-2, B-1, C-3, D-4 2. A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4 3. A-3, B-1, C-2, D-4 4. A-4, B-3, C-1, D-2

4. Match the following legislative bills with their key objectives: List-I (Bills) A. Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 B. Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026 C. Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 D. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 List-II (Objectives) 1. Strengthen legal framework against malpractices in public examinations. 2. Modernise legal provisions for digital banking records. 3. Replace colonial-era legislation on bankers' books evidence. 4. Amend direct taxation laws and capital market regulations. Options: 1. A-4, B-2, C-1, D-3 2. A-4, B-3, C-1, D-2 3. A-1, B-3, C-4, D-2 4. A-2, B-4, C-3, D-1

5. Consider the following statements regarding the Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act, 1996: 1. The Act empowers Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas to strengthen tribal self-governance. 2. The Standing Committee on Rural Development reviewed its implementation in 2026. 3. The Act mandates the exclusion of traditional tribal leaders from Gram Sabha decision-making. How many of the above statements are correct?

   (A) Only one statement is correct
   (B) Only two statements are correct
   (C) All three statements are correct

(D) None of the statements are correct

6. **Assertion (A): The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, institutionalises integrity in competitive examinations. Reason (R): The Bill seeks to strengthen the legal framework against paper leaks and other malpractices. 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.**

7. **Consider the following statements regarding judicial pronouncements on privacy and data protection: 1. Recent judgments have reaffirmed the constitutional status of the right to privacy under Article 21. 2. The judgments pertain specifically to digital surveillance by non-state actors. 3. The rulings highlight the need for institutional safeguards in data processing. How many of the above statements are correct?**

   (A) Only one statement is correct
   (B) Only two statements are correct
   (C) All three statements are correct
   (D) None of the statements are correct

8. **Match the following governance mechanisms with their correct descriptions: List-I (Mechanisms) A. Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) B. Fisheries Sector Crisis Response C. RBI Bulletin August 2026 D. Public Charge Doctrine (US Immigration) List-II (Descriptions) 1. A crop insurance scheme aimed at climate-resilient agriculture. 2. A legal principle under US immigration law governing visa eligibility. 3. A report assessing domestic macroeconomic resilience amid global uncertainties. 4. A sector-specific crisis exacerbated by**

policy delays and institutional gaps. Options: 1. A-1, B-4, C-3, D-2 2. A-2, B-1, C-4, D-3 3. A-3, B-2, C-1, D-4 4. A-4, B-3, C-2, D-1

Descriptive

1. **Critically analyse the constitutional and legal implications of the Supreme Court's decision to reconsider the OBC creamy-layer criteria, particularly in the context of reservation policy and civil service recruitment. Discuss the balance between social justice objectives and meritocratic principles in governance. (150 words) (10)**

   Expected points:

   - Constitutional basis of reservation under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) and its evolution through judicial interpretations
   - Judicial review of executive/administrative decisions in reservation policies
   - Impact on civil service recruitment fairness and efficiency
   - Tension between social justice and meritocracy in public employment
   - Role of the state in balancing equity and efficiency in governance

2. **Examine the constitutional and institutional framework governing the separation of voters' lists for Parliament, State Legislatures, and Local Bodies. Discuss the implications of using a unified voter list for different tiers of governance, with reference to the Chief Election Commissioner's clarification. (250 words) (15)**

   Expected points:

   - Constitutional provisions under Article 326 and the Representation of the People Act, 1951
   - Separation of powers between Union and State governments in electoral matters
   - Rationale for distinct voter lists at different governance levels

- Legal and administrative challenges in maintaining unified voter lists
- Impact on electoral integrity, federalism, and local self-governance
- Judicial precedents on electoral rolls and voter eligibility

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Answer Key

Objective

1. **(B)** Statements 1 and 2 are correct as they reflect the Supreme Court's action and the context of the creamy-layer exclusion. Statement 3 is incorrect because the plea seeks clarification, not blanket extension.

2. **(B)** The assertion (A) is true as the Supreme Court is examining legal and policy aspects of ethanol blending. The reason (R) is also true and directly explains the assertion, as the PIL's demands align with the court's scrutiny.

3. **(B)** Article 243M pertains to the delimitation of constituencies for Panchayats in Scheduled Areas. Article 324 empowers the Election Commission. Article 326 grants universal adult suffrage, and Article 327 empowers Parliament to legislate on election matters.

4. **(C)** The Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, focuses on direct taxation and capital market regulations. The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, modernises legal provisions for digital banking records and replaces colonial-era legislation. The Public Examination Bill strengthens integrity in examinations, and the Mines and Minerals Bill modernises mineral governance.

5. **(B)** Only statement 1 is correct as it reflects the Act's empowerment of Gram Sabhas. Statement 2 is incorrect because the review was conducted by the Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, not the Rural Development

Committee. Statement 3 is incorrect as the Act does not mandate exclusion of traditional leaders.

6. **(B)** The assertion (A) is true as the Bill aims to institutionalise integrity. The reason (R) is also true and directly explains the assertion, as the Bill's primary objective is to address malpractices like paper leaks.

7. **(C)** Statements 1 and 3 are correct as they reflect the constitutional status of privacy and the need for safeguards. Statement 2 is incorrect because the judgments address surveillance by state and non-state actors.

8. **(B)** PMFBY is a crop insurance scheme (A-1). The Fisheries Sector Crisis involves sector-specific challenges (B-4). The RBI Bulletin assesses macroeconomic resilience (C-3). The Public Charge Doctrine is a US immigration principle (D-2).