UPSC DARPAN

शीलं परं भूषणम्

Sheelam param bhushanam · Character is the highest ornament

The motto of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, from Bhartrihari's Shatakatraya

Your one-stop solution for UPSC CSE examination resources.

The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 19 September 2026

General Studies · Daily Current Affairs · Concept Matrix · Point-Wise Analysis

Ability · Anonymity · Austerity

Free, and meant for every aspirant — whatever they can or cannot pay.

A Letter from the Editor

Why this magazine exists, and how it is meant to be read

This magazine begins with an admission rather than a promise. The Civil Services Examination is not, in the end, a test of how much you have collected. Our own reading of the last decade's papers is that well over sixty per cent of what this examination actually asks — across the General Studies papers, the essay and the interview — is not a fact you can look up. It is a critical issue: a live public problem with competing interests inside it, on which you are expected to have thought, weighed, and arrived somewhere. The candidate who has memorised a thousand facts and thought about none of them is the candidate who writes four hundred marks and cannot understand why.

That is the whole reason this magazine exists in the form it does. Every story here is turned into a study card that does the thinking work with you and not for you: what happened, which line of the syllabus it sits on, why the examiner keeps returning to this theme, the handful of facts that could actually decide a Prelims option, an analysis broken into named points so the argument can be read from the headings alone, a Mains question in the exam's own phrasing, a model approach to it — and then the question a District Magistrate or a Joint Secretary would actually have to answer on this very issue. That last part is the one most compilations leave out, and it is the one the examination is really testing.

The second reason is simpler and harder. Too many capable candidates fall behind for reasons that have nothing to do with ability. They do not know which sources matter. They cannot reach the good material, or cannot pay for it. They study in Hindi and find that the honest, current, well-organised version of a topic exists only in English. We have seen this, and we do not accept it as the natural order of things. Nothing in UPSC Darpan is behind a payment, and nothing assumes a coaching class. Whatever we read each morning — the newspapers, PIB, PRS, the court's own record, the research journals — is read once, properly, and handed on in full. No aspirant should be left behind because of where they were born, what their family earns, or which language they think in.

The third reason is the one we do not say out loud very often. The kind of officer this examination is supposed to produce was described long ago in Mussoorie, and the description has not improved since: a Karma Yogi, a civil servant whose soul is suffused with the principles of Ability, Anonymity and Austerity. Ability, because good intentions administered incompetently still hurt people. Anonymity, because the officer whose name is in the newspaper every week is usually not the officer whose district is working. Austerity, because the distance between the officer's life and the citizen's life is exactly the distance at which empathy fails. We are not there. But that is the standard this magazine is trying to be worth, and the standard we are asking you to prepare against — not the cut-off.

So read it slowly. Do not try to finish it. Take three cards, understand them to the point where you could argue either side, and write one answer. That is a better morning than reading all twenty-five and remembering none. And when you sit in that room, remember what you are actually being selected for.

— The Editor

UPSC Darpan · 19 September 2026

We want to become the Mussoorie-wala Karma Yogi — a civil servant whose soul is suffused with the principles of Ability, Anonymity and Austerity. And we shall become.

Our Inspiration

Our inspiration, and the reason this initiative exists

Rakesh Verma Sir

Indian Administrative Service, 1981 batch

Every initiative has a person standing behind it who never asked to be named. Ours is Rakesh Verma sir — an IAS officer of the 1981 batch, who spent a career inside the administration and then, after retiring from it, went back to the classroom to teach the next set of officers. What he gave us was not a strategy. It was a way of looking at the work.

WHAT HE TAUGHT US

1. **सेवा परमो धर्मः — service is the highest duty, and it is a duty, not a favour —** He would not let the word 'service' stay decorative. A civil servant does not confer a benefit on a citizen; the citizen is entitled, and the officer is discharging an obligation. Once you accept that, the tone of an office changes — the file moves because someone is waiting on the other side of it, not because a note demanded it.
2. **The Mussoorie-wala Karma Yogi: Ability, Anonymity, Austerity —** Ability, because good intentions administered incompetently still hurt people. Anonymity, because the officer whose name is in the newspaper every week is usually not the officer whose district is working. Austerity, because the distance between the officer's life and the citizen's life is the distance at which empathy fails. He taught these three as one instruction, not three virtues to be picked from.
3. **Begin with the last person, not the average person —** His constant test for any scheme, any circular, any decision: what happens to the person at the end of the line — the one with no documentation, no connection, no way to complain, and no idea the scheme exists. A policy that works for the median citizen and fails the last one has not worked. It has only been measured generously.
4. **Reach the last mile, because the last mile is where the state actually is —** Delivery, he insisted, is not the boring part that follows policy; it is the policy. The budget line means nothing until the money reaches the panchayat, the entitlement means nothing until the beneficiary is on the list, and the list means nothing if the person who was left out has no way back onto it. He made us look at the exclusion errors, not the coverage numbers.
5. **Understand the system before you criticise it —** He had no patience for the easy cynicism aspirants pick up online. Learn how a file actually moves, who signs, where the discretion sits, what the officer on the spot is trading off. Criticism that comes after that understanding is worth something; criticism that replaces it is noise — and it writes a shallow answer, too.
6. **Karma yoga at the desk: do the work, stay with the work —** He taught the Gita's instruction as an administrator's working rule, not as a sermon. You control the effort and the honesty; you do not control the transfer order, the posting, the recognition or the result. An officer who needs the outcome to feel the work was worth it will not last a career. Nor will an aspirant who needs the result to justify the year.
7. **Teach what you know, to whoever cannot pay for it —** The clearest thing he did was the simplest: after a full career, he went back and taught. Not to a selected batch that could afford it — to whoever turned up. That is where this initiative came from. The idea that good preparation material should not be a function of what a family can spend is not our idea; it is his.

> *We are not his equals and this is not his page. It is the receipt for something we were given for free, by a man who spent forty years serving the country and then spent his retirement teaching other people how to do it properly. सेवा परमो धर्मः — and we shall become.*

Quotes of the Day

Carry one into the introduction of an essay — not into every paragraph. Each is quoted from a documented source, so it can be attributed with confidence.

> *"Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him."*

— **Mahatma Gandhi** · *Known as Gandhi's Talisman, 1948*

Use in: Governance · Ethics · Welfare delivery

> *"In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness; in their welfare, his welfare."*

— **Kautilya** · *Arthashastra*

Use in: Public service · Governance · Indian thought

> *"Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy."*

— **Dr B. R. Ambedkar** · *Constituent Assembly, 25 November 1949*

Use in: Democracy · Social justice · Constitution

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Everything in today's edition, card by card.

9. Ethics & Administrator's Corner — Integrative Case Studies

10. Prelims Quick-Revision Facts

11. Essays of the Day

> *How to use this magazine — each story is a study card: what happened (The News), the syllabus topic it sits on (Static Linkage), why examiners return to this theme (Trend), the facts that could decide a Prelims option (Prelims Nuggets), a point-wise Analysis, a Mains question in the exam's own phrasing with a Model Approach, and the questions a District Magistrate or Joint Secretary would actually face on it. Every long field is broken into numbered points with its own heading, so the argument reads from the headings alone. Where a story works through a sequence of effects, the whole chain is given in one line before the points explain each link.*

1. Polity & Governance

A day in which four different institutions — Parliament's joint committee, the Election Commission, a High Court and the Supreme Court — were each asked the same underlying question: how far may a lawful authority go before process itself becomes the injury? Read the five cards together and the pattern is the exam's favourite one: the power exists, the purpose is defensible, and the safeguard is missing.

1.1 FCRA Amendment Bill Before the Joint Committee — Who Takes the Assets, and After Whose Hearing?

THE NEWS At the first meeting of Parliament's Joint Committee on the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, members questioned the proposed power to take over assets created with foreign contribution when an organisation's FCRA licence is cancelled, surrendered or lapses. Home Secretary Govind Mohan and senior Home Ministry officials briefed the committee, chaired by BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal, for more than two hours. Opposition members objected to the new 'designated authority', which would have a wide ambit; under the existing law the 'prescribed authority' is, by a notification of 5 November 2018, the Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary (Home) of the State or Union Territory concerned. DMK's P. Wilson and Trinamool Congress's Menaka Guruswamy argued that deprivation of property cannot be permitted without a prior hearing under Article 300A. Members also said the new law sets no deadline for custodianship, leaves the 'prescribed authority' a passive custodian unable to take substantive decisions on assets, and is silent on the final disposal of assets and the treatment of places of worship. The Home Ministry said the amendments aim at making the use of foreign contributions more transparent and accountable, and that the law is, at its core, a national-security legislation. Officials told the panel that the number of FCRA-registered NGOs has nearly halved over the past decade even as foreign contributions rose from ₹17,832 crore to ₹22,974 crore, and that protests against projects such as the Kudankulam nuclear plant and the Sardar Sarovar Dam were also discussed.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Licence lapses → assets vest provisionally in a designated authority → no deadline, no prior hearing → Article 300A challenge → constitutional question returns to the JPC

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **FCRA 2010 replaced a 1976 Cold War statute —** The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act was first enacted in 1976, at the height of Cold War geopolitics and amid deep mistrust of foreign influence on India's political and democratic institutions. Before 1976, organisations receiving foreign funds operated under general laws — the Societies Registration Act, the Trusts Act and the Companies Act — with no centralised mechanism to monitor foreign contributions. The present Act is the 2010 version, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs, not by a financial regulator; that placement is itself the clue to how Parliament has always classified the subject.

2. **Article 300A makes property a constitutional, not a fundamental, right —** Article 300A says no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law. It was inserted by the Forty-fourth Amendment, which removed the right to property from Part III. The consequence matters here: a deprivation must have statutory backing, and courts have read into that backing a requirement of fair procedure. The objection raised in the committee is precisely that vesting without a prior hearing supplies the 'law' but not the fairness.

3. **What the Bill actually adds, per PRS's Bill Track —** The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 25 March 2026 by the Ministry of Home Affairs and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on 12 August 2026. It adds cessation of a certificate — failure to renew before expiry, not applying for renewal, or denial of renewal — as a ground for asset vesting. Assets created wholly or partly with foreign contribution vest provisionally in the Designated Authority, and the vesting becomes permanent if the organisation cannot renew or obtain a fresh certificate. The authority may transfer such assets to ministries, departments, authorities or agencies, or sell them and credit the proceeds to the Consolidated Fund of India. An organisation may seek the return

	of a distinct or ascertainable portion funded domestically. 4. **Two changes that cut the other way —** Per PRS, the same Bill reduces the maximum imprisonment for violations from five years to one year, and requires prior government approval before an investigation is launched. A candidate who describes the Bill only as a tightening has read half of it. The correct description is a rebalancing: lighter criminal exposure, heavier proprietary consequence, and an extra executive filter before prosecution.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Civil society regulation is a recurring GS2 theme —** The syllabus head 'role of civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders' has produced questions on FCRA and on the regulation of voluntary organisations more than once. The examiner does not ask whether FCRA is good; it asks the candidate to hold accountability and space for civil society in the same answer. 2. **The committee stage is the answer's best material —** UPSC increasingly rewards process knowledge — who scrutinises a Bill and at what stage. A JPC examining a Home Ministry Bill, with named members raising an Article 300A objection, is a ready illustration for any question on parliamentary committees as instruments of legislative scrutiny. 3. **Article 300A questions have moved from Prelims to Mains —** The Article itself is a standard Prelims fact. What is newer is its use in Mains as the hinge for questions on the State's power to take property — land acquisition, demolition drives, attachment under economic statutes. This Bill supplies a fresh, non-land example.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• FCRA was first enacted in 1976; the Act in force is the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs. • The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 25 March 2026 and referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee on 12 August 2026. • Article 300A — no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law; inserted by the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, which removed property from the list of Fundamental Rights. • Under the existing framework, the 'prescribed authority' notified on 5 November 2018 is the Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary (Home) of the State or Union Territory concerned. • Proceeds from the sale of vested assets are to be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. • Before 1976, foreign-funded organisations were governed by the Societies Registration Act, the Indian Trusts Act and the Companies Act, with no centralised monitoring mechanism.
ANALYSIS	1. **The real dispute is about the gap between cancellation and finality —** Cancellation of a licence is an administrative decision that can be challenged. Vesting of assets is a proprietary consequence that is very hard to reverse once the asset has been transferred or sold. If vesting is provisional but has no outer time limit, and if the custodian cannot take substantive decisions, an organisation can be suspended in a state where it neither owns its hospital nor can run it. That gap, not the principle of regulation, is what the committee members attacked. 2. **A national-security framing changes the standard of review —** The Home Ministry told the panel the Bill is at its core national-security legislation. That framing is legally consequential: courts historically give the executive wider latitude where security is

	invoked, and the standard of proportionality is applied more softly. It also explains why the same Bill can reduce imprisonment while increasing asset consequences — the objective is described as containment of influence rather than punishment of individuals. 3. **The data cuts both ways and a good answer uses both halves —** Registered NGOs have nearly halved in a decade while receipts rose from ₹17,832 crore to ₹22,974 crore. The government reading is consolidation: fewer, better-monitored entities receiving more. The critical reading is attrition: compliance costs and renewal risk have driven out smaller organisations while large ones absorbed the flow. Both readings fit the same two numbers, which is exactly why the examiner likes them. 4. **The religious-funding breakdown is politically loaded and analytically thin —** Officials told the panel that of the ₹22,974 crore received in 2024-25, 57% went to social activities, 30% to education and 8% to religious purposes, and that within that religious share 73.05% went to Christian bodies and 17.81% to Hindu organisations, with just over 1% to Muslim organisations. A careful answer notes what this does not establish: share of receipts is not evidence of conduct, and the denominator — only 8% of all contributions — is small. Citing the figure without that caution is how a script acquires a slant it did not intend. 5. **Places of worship are the sharpest unresolved question —** Members pointed out that the Bill is silent on the treatment of places of worship among vested assets. Transferring a temple, church or mosque built partly with foreign contribution to a government agency would raise Article 25 and Article 26 questions that the Bill does not address. Silence in a statute is not neutrality; it is a delegation to the executive.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The regulation of foreign contributions to voluntary organisations must balance national security with the constitutional space for civil society. Critically examine the safeguards that a law providing for the vesting of foreign-funded assets should contain."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Open with the constitutional location of the problem —** Begin by placing the issue precisely: Article 300A permits deprivation by authority of law, and the question is what that law must contain. One line on FCRA's 1976 origin establishes that Parliament has always treated foreign funding as a security subject, not merely a financial one. 2. **State the legitimate objective before the criticism —** Concede the government's case fully — traceability of foreign money, prevention of circumvention through shell entities, and the fact that assets built with foreign contribution should not become a windfall for an entity that has lost the licence to receive it. An answer that begins in opposition reads as advocacy. 3. **Name the four safeguards a fair vesting provision needs —** A prior hearing before vesting becomes permanent; an outer time limit on provisional custodianship; a custodian with power to keep the asset in productive use, so hospitals and schools do not shut while the dispute runs; and an express carve-out or procedure for places of worship and for the domestically funded portion. 4. **Use the committee stage as evidence that the system works —** The JPC raising these objections is itself the answer to a question about parliamentary scrutiny. Say so — it converts a critical answer into a constructive one and shows the examiner you understand the legislative process, not only the text. 5. **Conclude on proportionality, not on preference —** End with the test rather than a verdict: a restriction on civil society is constitutional when the objective is legitimate, the means are rationally connected, and no less restrictive alternative achieves the same end. Vesting with a hearing and a deadline achieves the objective; vesting

	without either does not, and that is the whole of the criticism.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) notified as the prescribed authority. A large hospital trust's FCRA certificate has lapsed and its 300-bed hospital, built partly with foreign contribution, has provisionally vested in you. Patients are admitted. What do you do in the first week?** ***Approach:*** The patients come first and nothing in the statute requires otherwise. Issue an order continuing hospital operations under existing management as custodian-in-possession, with a State officer as observer and a weekly financial report — this keeps the asset productive without transferring title. Simultaneously write to the Ministry seeking a time-bound direction on final vesting, and put the trust on notice to file its claim for the domestically funded portion with documentary proof. Record in writing that you have not taken any irreversible step, because the day the matter reaches a court the first question will be whether the custodian preserved the asset or ran it down. The failure mode here is not illegality; it is drift — a custodian who signs nothing for eight months and lets the hospital empty. **Q2. Your State has 400 FCRA-registered organisations. The Ministry asks for a report on which are 'at risk' of cessation. How do you build that list without turning an administrative exercise into a blacklist?** ***Approach:*** Define the criterion in writing and confine it to the statute: certificates expiring within twelve months, renewal applications not filed, and applications with a known deficiency. Do not add fields on the organisation's activity, affiliation or past protest involvement — the moment the list acquires those columns it becomes an intelligence product and will leak as one. Share the list with each organisation concerned so that a lapse is cured rather than recorded; a regulator whose first contact with a defaulter is the cancellation order has misunderstood what the register is for. Retain the file noting showing that the criterion was fixed before the data was gathered, not after. **Q3. A Christian-run school and a temple trust in your district both face vesting. Local political actors want one treated differently from the other. How do you insulate the decision?** ***Approach:*** Use a single written procedure applied to both in the same sequence on the same dates, and say so on the file. Article 14 protection here is procedural before it is substantive — identical process is the evidence that discrimination did not occur. On the religious-premises question, record that the statute is silent and seek express instructions in writing rather than improvising; an officer who invents a rule for a place of worship will be defending it personally in court. And decline to meet either delegation alone: joint hearings, minuted, remove the suggestion of a private assurance.

1.2 Election Commission Freezes 'All India Trinamool Congress' and Its Symbol, Gives Both Factions New Ones

THE NEWS The Election Commission of India on Friday barred both factions of the Trinamool Congress — one led by Mamata Banerjee and the other led by Ritabrata Banerjee, with Arup Roy as petitioner — from using the party name 'All India Trinamool Congress' and the reserved symbol 'flowers and grass' (Jora Ghas Phul). The Mamata Banerjee-led group was allotted the name 'Mamata All India Trinamool Congress' with a 'football player' symbol; the Ritabrata-led group became the 'Democratic Trinamool Congress' with an 'envelope' symbol. Both factions submitted their choice of names and symbols by 11 a.m. on Friday. The ECI said the new names and symbols will remain in force until a final verdict on the claim to the original party name and symbol is delivered; both factions are recognised political parties in West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura. The order applies to the assembly bypolls in Nandigram and Rejinagar, scheduled for 6 October. The Mamata faction has moved the Supreme Court challenging the freeze, with the plea filed under Diary No. 58005/2026.

> Mamata Banerjee called it 'a black day in the democratic history of the country' and 'unconstitutional, illegal, undemocratic'. Rahul Gandhi called it 'party theft' following 'vote theft', and Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal described the order as the Chief Election Commissioner's 'late-night birthday gift'. The BJP's Sudhanshu Trivedi replied that the Congress had itself repeatedly brought down elected State governments and sidelined veterans. There is confusion over the 'envelope' symbol because the ISF, an existing party, has a similar symbol and its candidate has already filed a nomination in Nandigram.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rival claims to one party → EC cannot verify a clear majority before the poll → interim freeze under Paragraph 15 → both factions get temporary names and free symbols → final ownership decided later

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Paragraph 15 of the Symbols Order is the whole legal basis —** The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 is not an Act of Parliament; it is an order issued by the Election Commission under Article 324 read with the Conduct of Elections Rules. Paragraph 15 empowers the Commission to decide disputes among rival sections of a recognised political party, and its decision binds all rival sections. The Commission's own rules record that where an election is imminent and the poll body cannot immediately verify a clear majority or conclude substantive proceedings, it may temporarily freeze the parent party's name and official symbol so that neither faction uses them, and direct the factions to submit preferences for alternative temporary names and to choose separate symbols from the list of free symbols. 2. **Article 324 is the source of the Commission's authority —** Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission. The Symbols Order draws its life from that plenary provision, which is why a symbol dispute is decided by an executive constitutional body and not by a civil court. That also explains the route of challenge: not a suit, but a writ petition to the Supreme Court, which is what the Mamata faction has filed. 3. **Sadiq Ali is the precedent every symbol dispute runs through —** The Commission's settled approach in a split has been to look at support in the party's legislature wing and organisational wing, an approach traceable to the Congress split of 1969. That split itself reached the Commission: the original party with a 'pair of bullocks carrying a yoke' divided, and the poll body allotted 'a cow with calf' to the Indira-led Congress (R) — Requisition — while letting the Congress (O) — Organisation — retain the bullocks. 4. **The 1978 split produced today's 'hand' —** Following the 1978 Congress split and the resulting dispute before the Commission, the 'cow and calf' symbol was frozen and the 'hand' symbol was allotted to the Indira-formed breakaway party, recognised as 'Congress-I'. Indira Gandhi retained the hand even after the 1980 victory and official recognition, as it was considered auspicious. The current freeze is therefore not a novelty but the fourth act of a long play — Congress in 1969 and 1978, Shiv Sena, NCP, and now the Trinamool Congress.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Party symbols sit in the Prelims sweet spot —** The Symbols Order is secondary legislation with a constitutional parent, a named paragraph, and a decision-maker who is not a court. Every one of those is a distinguishing feature the examiner can build a pairing or statement question around. 2. **The anti-defection and symbol questions are converging —** The Shiv Sena and NCP disputes taught candidates to hold two separate questions together — who is the party for the Speaker under the Tenth Schedule, and who is the party for the Commission under Paragraph 15. The answer need not be the same, and UPSC has begun to test exactly that asymmetry. 3. **Institutional-autonomy questions now demand specifics —** A Mains answer on the Election Commission's independence that does not name the provision it acted under,

	the interim nature of the order, and the availability of judicial review reads as commentary. This story supplies all three.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 is issued by the Election Commission; Paragraph 15 governs disputes among rival sections of a recognised political party. ● Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission of India. ● In the 1969 Congress split the Commission allotted 'a cow with calf' to Congress (R) — Requisition — while Congress (O) — Organisation — retained the 'pair of bullocks carrying a yoke'. ● The 'hand' symbol was allotted to the Indira-led breakaway party recognised as Congress-I after the 1978 split, when the 'cow and calf' symbol was frozen. ● A frozen name and symbol are restored or finally allotted only when the Commission decides the claim; the interim allotment is from the Commission's list of free symbols. ● Both Trinamool factions are recognised political parties in West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura.
ANALYSIS	1. **The freeze is procedurally defensible and politically explosive at the same time —** Paragraph 15 exists precisely because a poll body cannot adjudicate a party's internal majority in the fortnight before a bypoll. Freezing both claims is the neutral option — it disadvantages neither faction relative to the other. What it does do is disadvantage both relative to every other party on the ballot, because a symbol is how a low-literacy electorate finds its party. That is the cost the Order imposes, and it is a real one. 2. **Timing is doing most of the political work —** The order came days before nominations for a 6 October bypoll, which is why the Opposition's attack is about the hour of the order rather than its legality. Whether or not the timing was chosen, the lesson for institutional design is that a power exercised close to a poll acquires an appearance of partisanship that the same power exercised eight months earlier would not. Election bodies everywhere manage this with quiet-period conventions; the Symbols Order has none. 3. **The 'envelope' clash shows the free-symbol list is under strain —** The envelope allotted to one faction resembles a symbol already used by the ISF, whose candidate has filed in the same constituency. A symbol system works only if symbols are visually distinguishable to a voter glancing at a ballot unit. When two similar symbols appear in one constituency, the Commission has manufactured exactly the confusion the Order exists to prevent. 4. **Read the history and the outrage looks selective on all sides —** The Congress, which called this 'party theft', was itself the beneficiary of a freeze in 1978 when the 'hand' was allotted to Indira Gandhi's breakaway group. The BJP, which defends the order, opposed the same logic when it applied elsewhere. A Mains answer that records this symmetry is more persuasive than one that takes a side, and it is also more accurate. 5. **The real constitutional question is about the interim, not the final order —** Nobody seriously disputes that the Commission may eventually decide who the party is. The question the Supreme Court will face is whether an interim order that strips both factions of the parent identity during an election is proportionate, or whether the status quo should have been preserved in favour of the faction in possession until the claim was decided. That is the question worth writing about.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The power of the Election Commission to decide disputes between rival factions of a political party is an administrative power with electoral consequences. Discuss the safeguards needed when such a power is exercised on the eve of an election."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Establish the source of the power first —** Article 324, the Symbols Order 1968 as subordinate legislation, and Paragraph 15 as the operative provision. Note that the power is quasi-judicial in character though exercised by an executive constitutional body — that hybrid is the reason safeguards matter. 2. **Explain why an interim freeze is the least-bad option —** Give the Commission its due: verifying organisational and legislative majorities takes months, elections do not wait, and allotting the symbol to one claimant would pre-judge the dispute. The freeze is neutral between claimants even though it is costly to both. 3. **Then name the three costs the freeze imposes —** Voter recognition is lost in a system built on symbols; the faction in possession loses more than the challenger, so neutrality between parties is not neutrality in effect; and a hastily allotted free symbol can duplicate an existing one, as the envelope case shows. 4. **Propose safeguards that are actually implementable —** A quiet period barring interim freezes within a fixed number of days of a poll notification unless the dispute arose later; a duty to record reasons for the timing; screening of free symbols against symbols already in use in the affected constituency; and an outer limit within which the final Paragraph 15 decision must be delivered. 5. **Close on the difference between neutrality and fairness —** Conclude that an institution can be perfectly even-handed between two parties and still produce an unfair result for the voter, and that the design question — not the motive question — is what reform should address.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the District Election Officer in Nandigram. Two symbols on your ballot unit look alike to a voter at arm's length. Nomination is closed and you cannot change the allotment. What do you actually do?** ***Approach:*** You cannot alter the symbol, so work on everything downstream of it. Redesign the ballot unit layout so the two similar symbols are not adjacent; increase the size and contrast of the symbol panel within the permitted format; and put both symbols side by side in the voter-awareness material with the candidate's name and party name printed beneath, distributed through booth-level officers and the mock poll. Brief presiding officers that the commonest error will be a voter asking 'which one is the envelope' and instruct them on the permitted, neutral answer — pointing at the display, never at a candidate. Finally, write to the Commission recording the risk in advance; an officer who flags a foreseeable confusion before the poll is doing his job, one who reports it afterwards is writing an excuse. **Q2. Both factions hold rallies claiming to be the 'real' party and each asks you to act against the other's publicity material for misrepresentation. How do you decide?** ***Approach:*** Apply the order, not the politics. The Commission's direction is that neither faction may use the frozen name or symbol; the test for every complaint is therefore mechanical — does the material display the frozen name or the frozen symbol? If yes, issue notice and require removal, whichever faction it is, on the same timeline. If the material only asserts a claim in words — 'we are the real party' — that is political speech and not a violation, and you should say so in writing rather than being drawn into adjudicating the claim. Dispose of both complaints in a single order on the same day, so neither side can point to a gap in treatment. **Q3. A senior officer suggests you 'go slow' on one faction's complaints until the political picture clarifies. How do you respond?**

	Approach: Ask for the instruction in writing, which usually ends the matter. If it comes in writing, comply only if it is lawful and record it; if it is not, decline and report upward, because in election work the file is the only protection an officer has. The deeper point is that 'going slow' is not a neutral act — in a fortnight-long campaign, delay is a decision, and it is the form of partisanship that is hardest to prove and easiest to commit. The officer's duty here is not heroism; it is timestamped, symmetrical disposal of every complaint.

1.3 Telangana High Court Disqualifies a Legislator Under the Tenth Schedule After the Speaker Declined To

THE NEWS The Telangana High Court has set aside the Speaker's decision and disqualified Danam Nagender, who was elected as MLA from Khairatabad on a Bharat Rashtra Samithi ticket in December 2023 and later contested the Secunderabad Lok Sabha seat on a Congress ticket. Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar had dismissed the disqualification petitions on 11 March. The BRS moved the High Court in April 2024. A Bench of Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice G.M. Mohiuddin held that the case fell under paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule read with Article 191(2), and the seat stands rendered vacant. BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao responded with 'Satyameva Jayate'. Nine other BRS MLAs switched to the Congress between March and August 2024.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

MLA elected on one party's ticket → contests another party's Lok Sabha seat → disqualification petition → Speaker dismisses → High Court reviews → seat declared vacant

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Paragraph 2(1)(a) is the 'voluntarily giving up membership' limb —** The Tenth Schedule disqualifies a member of a House belonging to a political party if he has voluntarily given up his membership of that party. The words are wider than 'resignation' — courts have held that giving up membership can be inferred from conduct, and contesting an election on another party's ticket is about as clear a piece of conduct as the provision contemplates. 2. **Article 191(2) supplies the disqualification for a State legislature —** Article 191(2) provides that a person shall be disqualified for being a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State if he is so disqualified under the Tenth Schedule. Article 102(2) is the corresponding provision for Parliament. Naming the right Article for the right House is the kind of precision a Prelims pairing question is built on. 3. **The Speaker decides, but the decision is reviewable —** Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule makes the presiding officer's decision final, and paragraph 7 originally sought to bar the jurisdiction of courts. The bar has not survived: the Speaker acts as a tribunal when deciding under the Tenth Schedule, and that decision is subject to judicial review. This case is a direct illustration — a High Court setting aside a Speaker's dismissal and itself declaring the seat vacant. 4. **The 2003 amendment removed the split defence —** The Ninety-first Amendment deleted the provision that had protected a 'split' of one-third of a legislature party, leaving merger of two-thirds as the only surviving exception. That is why nine other legislators crossing over does not, by itself, cure anything: numbers below the merger threshold are legally irrelevant.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Anti-defection is a perennial and the question has shifted —** The old question was what the Tenth Schedule says. The current question is why it does not work — and the answer the examiner is looking for names the Speaker's indefinite delay as the central defect. This judgment is the counter-example where review supplied what the Speaker

	did not. 2. **Speaker's impartiality is now a standing Mains theme —** Recommendations to shift the adjudicatory power from the Speaker to an independent tribunal or to the Election Commission recur in every serious answer. A live case in which a High Court reversed a Speaker gives that argument a contemporary anchor instead of a textbook one. 3. **Federal and party-system questions borrow this material —** Mass defections after a general election are not only a legal problem; they are evidence about the party system. PSIR and Sociology answers on party fragmentation use exactly this data, which is why the card is worth carrying beyond GS2.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule — disqualification for voluntarily giving up membership of the political party on whose ticket the member was elected. ● Article 191(2) disqualifies a person for membership of a State legislature if disqualified under the Tenth Schedule; Article 102(2) is the parallel provision for Parliament. ● The Tenth Schedule was inserted by the Constitution (Fifty-second Amendment) Act; the Ninety-first Amendment deleted the 'split' exception, leaving merger by two-thirds as the only defence. ● Paragraph 6 makes the presiding officer's decision final, but that decision is subject to judicial review; the Speaker acts as a tribunal while deciding. ● Under the Tenth Schedule the exception that survives is a merger, which requires agreement of not less than two-thirds of the members of the legislature party.
ANALYSIS	1. **The defect the case exposes is time, not text —** The member was elected in December 2023, contested on another party's ticket in 2024, the Speaker dismissed the petitions in March and the High Court decided now. By the time the seat is declared vacant, a substantial part of the term has run. The Tenth Schedule's text worked; its clock did not. Every credible reform proposal — a statutory time limit on the Speaker, or a different adjudicator — is aimed at the clock. 2. **Judicial review is a remedy of last resort and it shows —** A High Court setting aside a Speaker's order is constitutionally sound but institutionally awkward: the court must second-guess a presiding officer on facts about party membership. The awkwardness is the argument for moving the jurisdiction out of the legislature altogether, so that review becomes appellate rather than supervisory. 3. **Nine other crossings make the individual case look like a system —** Nine BRS MLAs moved to the Congress between March and August 2024, below the two-thirds merger threshold. A party can therefore be hollowed out without ever triggering the merger exception, provided each crossing is treated as an individual case and each individual case takes two years to decide. That is not a loophole in the text; it is an arithmetic consequence of slow adjudication. 4. **The voter's mandate is the interest nobody represents in the proceedings —** The petitioner is a party, the respondent is a member, and the adjudicator is a presiding officer. The constituency that voted for a candidate on a particular party's promise is not a party to the case, and no relief runs to it — a bypoll returns a seat, not the two years. This is the strongest normative argument for speed, and it belongs in the conclusion of any answer on defection.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Tenth Schedule has not failed in its drafting so much as in its adjudication. Critically examine, with reference to recent High Court intervention in disqualification proceedings."

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **State the provision and the exception in two lines —** Paragraph 2(1)(a), Article 191(2), and the surviving merger exception after the Ninety-first Amendment. Precision here buys you credibility for the argument that follows. 2. **Argue that the text does its job —** Show with this case that a member who contests on another party's ticket is caught squarely by the voluntarily-giving-up limb. The drafting is not the problem, and saying so distinguishes your answer from the standard critique. 3. **Locate the failure in the adjudication —** Dates make the argument: elected in December 2023, crossed in 2024, Speaker's dismissal in March, court's decision now. Name the consequence — a member sits, votes and holds office through the period the law meant to prevent. 4. **Evaluate the reform options honestly —** A time limit on the Speaker is the least disruptive but relies on the same officer; an independent tribunal is cleaner but raises a separation-of-powers objection about outsiders adjudicating House membership; the Election Commission route borrows an institution already trusted with party disputes. Say which you prefer and why, in one sentence. 5. **Conclude with the interest that is missing —** End on the voter — the person with the strongest claim and no standing in the proceeding. That is the line that makes the answer memorable and it is analytically true.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Secretary to a State Legislative Assembly, you are asked how long a disqualification petition may reasonably remain pending before the Speaker. What advice do you give in writing?** ***Approach:*** Advise that the Schedule prescribes no period but that the absence of a limit does not confer a discretion to never decide, because the power is quasi-judicial and quasi-judicial powers must be exercised within a reasonable time. Propose an internal standard operating procedure — pleadings closed within a fixed number of weeks, hearings scheduled on named dates, and a written order within a stated outer period — and record that the SOP is procedural and does not fetter the Speaker's decision on merits. This is the kind of advice that protects the institution: it gives the presiding officer a defensible timetable and removes the suggestion that delay was chosen. **Q2. The disqualified member's constituency has had an effectively absent representative for two years. As District Magistrate, how do you keep constituency-level administration from stalling during the vacancy?** ***Approach:*** Local administration should never have been dependent on the legislator in the first place, and the vacancy is the moment to prove it. Convene the district-level committees on their statutory schedule with the officials who are their real engine; publish a constituency-wise status of sanctioned works with timelines so that citizens can see progress without an intermediary; and hold a fixed monthly public grievance sitting at the block level so that the channel the MLA normally provides is replaced by an institutional one. Do not fill the political vacuum with the MLA's rivals — decline requests from all claimants equally, and route everything through the published calendar. **Q3. Party workers of both sides ask you, as Returning Officer for the eventual bypoll, to interpret what the court's order means for their candidate's eligibility. What is the right response?** ***Approach:*** Decline to interpret and say why. The Returning Officer's jurisdiction is the scrutiny of nominations against the statutory grounds, and an opinion offered informally before a nomination is filed has no legal status but very real political consequences. Direct both sides to the order itself and to the Commission's instructions, and state that any question of eligibility will be decided at scrutiny, in the

	presence of both, with reasons recorded. Giving a private preview to either side is how a Returning Officer loses the ability to be believed by the losing party — which is the only asset the office really has.

1.4 Over 37 Lakh Special Intensive Revision Appeals Still Pending in West Bengal's Tribunals, EC Tells the Supreme Court

THE NEWS The Election Commission has informed the Supreme Court that over 37 lakh of a total 38 lakh appeals arising out of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal are still pending before 19 Appellate Tribunals. The EC said only 1,02,231 appeals have been disposed of. The Appellate Tribunals were constituted by the Supreme Court over six months ago. The EC's affidavit, dated 16 September, covers appeals across 24 districts: 38,20,683 appeals were submitted regarding both inclusions and exclusions during the SIR exercise, and the number pending is 37,18,452. Of the 38 lakh appeals, only about seven lakh were filed by disenfranchised voters; the remaining 31 lakh were filed by the EC or by other objectors seeking to exclude more people from the roll. District annexures show Murshidabad with 7,47,921 appeals filed and only 514 decided; Uttar Dinajpur with 3,03,155 pending and 9,104 disposed; and Purba Bardhaman with 2,80,029 appeals and only 131 decided. Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi appeared for petitioner Prasenjit Bose, chairperson of the SIR Committee of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, who had complained that pendency and disposal rates were being kept secret; the affidavit followed a Supreme Court order of 28 August. Justice Joymalya Bagchi, on a Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, observed that the Court would consider whether appeals by disenfranchised voters seeking re-inclusion should be prioritised. Separately in Delhi, 728 voters from a Yamuna riverbank jhuggi cluster in the Bela Estate polling area of the Chandni Chowk Assembly constituency have sought return to the draft roll; the pre-SIR roll had 4,142 voters there, 728 were placed on the 'absent, shifted, dead and duplicate' list, and of about 550 residents still living there, 462 have submitted Form 6.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Intensive revision → mass inclusion and exclusion appeals → 19 tribunals for 38 lakh cases → 97% pendency → bypolls approach with the roll unsettled

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Article 324 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950 govern the roll —** Preparation of electoral rolls is entrusted to the Election Commission under Article 324, and the machinery — electoral registration officers, claims and objections, and appeals — sits in the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Form 6 is the application for inclusion of a name in the roll, which is why the Delhi cluster's 462 Form 6 filings are the operative fact there.
2. **Universal adult suffrage is an Article 326 guarantee —** Article 326 provides that elections to the House of the People and to State Legislative Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage, with every citizen not less than eighteen years of age and not otherwise disqualified entitled to be registered. A roll revision that removes an eligible citizen is therefore not an administrative inconvenience; it touches the constitutional basis of the franchise.
3. **The right to vote's legal character is contested and that matters here —** Indian courts have generally treated the right to vote as a statutory right conferred by the Representation of the People Acts, while treating the freedom to express a choice at the ballot as flowing from Article 19(1)(a). Whichever characterisation is used, the remedy for wrongful exclusion is procedural — appeal, and then writ — which is exactly the channel that has now silted up.
4. **The Appellate Tribunals here are a court-created layer —** The tribunals hearing these appeals were constituted following Supreme Court orders over six months ago. That is worth noting precisely: this is not a standing statutory tier but a bespoke mechanism created to absorb the volume generated by the revision, which is why its capacity was never designed against the caseload it received.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Electoral-roll integrity has become a running GS2 thread —** Questions on free and fair elections used to turn on model code and expenditure. The current thread runs through the roll itself — inclusion, exclusion, duplication and the machinery for correcting error. Three consecutive editions of this magazine have carried SIR cards, which is itself the signal. 2. **Numbers with a denominator are what the examiner rewards —** 'Lakhs of appeals pending' is a headline. '37,18,452 pending of 38,20,683 filed, with 1,02,231 disposed across 19 tribunals' is an answer. Carry the ratio, not the adjective. 3. **The composition of the appeals is the analytical hook —** Seven lakh appeals by excluded voters against 31 lakh by the Commission and other objectors seeking further exclusion inverts the intuitive reading of the story. UPSC likes facts that reverse the obvious inference.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls in the Election Commission of India. • Article 326 provides for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage, at not less than eighteen years of age. • Form 6 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 is the application for inclusion of a name in the electoral roll. • 'ASDD' in roll revision practice denotes the absent, shifted, dead and duplicate category of entries proposed for deletion. • Preparation of electoral rolls for parliamentary and assembly constituencies is governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950; conduct of elections by the Act of 1951.
ANALYSIS	1. **A 97% pendency rate is not a backlog, it is a non-functioning remedy —** 1,02,231 disposals against 38,20,683 filings is a disposal rate of under three per cent across six months. Murshidabad's 514 decisions against 7,47,921 appeals and Purba Bardhaman's 131 against 2,80,029 are worse still. When the appellate route is this slow, the deletion made at the revision stage is, for practical purposes, final — the remedy exists on paper and the outcome is decided by the first administrative decision. 2. **The composition of the appeals reframes the entire dispute —** Only about seven lakh appeals came from people seeking to get back on the roll; 31 lakh were filed by the Commission or other objectors seeking to remove more names. That means the tribunals are mostly processing proposed exclusions, while the minority of appeals with a citizen's franchise at stake waits in the same undifferentiated queue. Justice Bagchi's question — whether re-inclusion appeals should be prioritised — follows directly from that arithmetic, and it is the single most useful line in the story. 3. **Capacity was never matched to the exercise that generated the load —** Nineteen tribunals for 24 districts and 38 lakh appeals is roughly two lakh appeals per tribunal. No adjudicatory body decides two lakh matters in six months while giving each a hearing. The design failure is upstream: an intensive revision was launched without provisioning the appellate capacity its own error rate would require. 4. **The Delhi cluster shows what exclusion looks like at ground level —** In one polling area, 728 of 4,142 voters went onto the ASDD list; about 550 people are still living there and 462 have filed Form 6 to get back. The pattern is the familiar one — people whose housing is informal or was demolished are the hardest to verify and the easiest to mark as shifted. The administrative category 'shifted' does a great deal of work in a city where the poor move within the same ward.

	5. **Bypolls make pendency a substantive, not procedural, problem —** Nandigram and Rejinagar vote on 6 October. An appeal decided after polling day restores a name to a roll for a future election but cannot restore the vote that was not cast. Timeliness in electoral adjudication is therefore not a service-delivery metric; it is the difference between a remedy and a formality.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"An appellate remedy that cannot be exercised within the electoral cycle is not a remedy at all. Examine this proposition in the context of large-scale revision of electoral rolls."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Frame the constitutional stake at the start —** Article 326's adult suffrage and Article 324's entrustment of the roll to the Commission. One line establishing that wrongful exclusion is a constitutional injury, not a clerical one, sets the register for the whole answer. 2. **Use the numbers as the argument, not as decoration —** 38,20,683 filed, 37,18,452 pending, 1,02,231 disposed, 19 tribunals, six months. Then the district figures. The proposition in the question is proved by arithmetic, so do the arithmetic. 3. **Make the composition point the analytical centre —** Seven lakh re-inclusion appeals inside a queue of 38 lakh, most of which seek further exclusion. Argue that undifferentiated queuing of qualitatively different claims is itself a design flaw, and that triage by consequence is the correction. 4. **Propose remedies that match the diagnosis —** Prioritised listing of re-inclusion appeals; a deadline tied to the poll calendar rather than to the filing date; a presumption in favour of continuance on the roll where an elector appears in person with proof of residence; and capacity provisioned in advance in proportion to the revision's expected error rate. 5. **Conclude on the asymmetry of errors —** End by naming the asymmetry that should govern the design: wrongly including one ineligible name dilutes a vote marginally, while wrongly excluding one eligible citizen extinguishes a vote entirely. A system that treats both errors as equal has chosen the wrong default.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Electoral Registration Officer for a constituency containing a riverbank cluster where 728 names went onto the ASDD list. About 550 residents still live there. How do you correct this without simply restoring every name?** ***Approach:*** Go there. The error is a verification error and it will not be fixed from the office, because the problem is that informal housing does not generate the documentary trail the form expects. Hold a camp at the cluster with the booth-level officer, accept Form 6 with any of the permitted proofs, and use field verification by the BLO plus attestation of residence as the primary evidence rather than demanding a document the resident cannot possess. Where a name was marked 'shifted' but the person is physically present and identified, record that finding and restore. Publish the list of restored and rejected names at the site itself with reasons, so that a rejected person knows what to appeal against. And send a report upward on why 728 of 4,142 were flagged in one area — a 17% flag rate in a single polling area is a method problem, not a population problem. **Q2. Nineteen tribunals cannot decide 37 lakh appeals before the bypoll. As the officer coordinating them, what triage do you propose?** ***Approach:*** Propose written triage, because informal prioritisation will be attacked as favouritism. Separate the docket into appeals by individuals seeking re-inclusion in the two constituencies actually going to the poll, appeals by individuals elsewhere, and objections filed by the Commission or third parties seeking exclusion. List the first category on a daily board with a short standard hearing, because that is the only

category where delay destroys the right rather than postponing it. Seek the Court's approval for the triage rather than adopting it administratively — the same order that protects the elector protects the officer. And place on record what the tribunals can actually deliver at current capacity, so that nobody later pretends the timetable was achievable.

Q3. Political workers from both sides offer to 'help' by submitting bulk Form 6 applications and bulk objections. What is your position?

Approach: Accept what the law permits and refuse what it does not. Any elector may file a claim and an objection, and bulk filing is not by itself illegal — but each application must be individually signed and each objection must disclose the objector and the ground, because a bundle of unsigned forms is not a set of claims, it is a list. Set up a receipt-with-acknowledgement counter so that every filing is traceable to a named person, and publish weekly counts of claims and objections received by party-affiliated filers alongside those received directly. Transparency is the only defence against the accusation, which will certainly come from whichever side loses, that the roll was manipulated in your office.

1.5 Two State Public Service Commissions Under Investigation in One Week — Karnataka and Jharkhand

THE NEWS The chairman of the Karnataka Public Service Commission, Shivashankarappa S Sahukar, 61, was suspended by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on 25 August on the State Cabinet's recommendation, an Indian Express investigation has found. First, his daughter Suma Sahukar, 28, was selected as an industrial extension officer in the state industries and commerce department under the OBC IIIB quota; during document verification in February 2026 she allegedly produced an income certificate declaring the family's annual income at ₹40,000, though KPSC's own records show her father's gross monthly salary as chairman was ₹3.60 lakh in 2023, over ₹42 lakh a year and more than a hundred times the declared figure; an FIR for forgery and fraud now names her. Second, the paper for 400 veterinary-officer posts advertised in 2024 was allegedly leaked: 29 candidates, including another relative of the chairman, scored abnormally high in the January 2026 test, and the CID probe has found candidates paid up to ₹80 lakh to middlemen, were housed at resorts, coached on answers and driven to exam centres. Middleman Basavaraj Kannale and KPSC's controller of exams, IAS officer Gyanendra Kumar Gangwar, have been arrested; Sahukar's anticipatory bail was rejected on 7 September. Sahukar was appointed a KPSC member in August 2019, 36 days into B S Yediyurappa's fourth term as chief minister, despite an unverifiable career record — the National Cooperative Union of India had ended his contract in 2011 for unsatisfactory, unpunctual work, after which, a former colleague said, he ran an informal money-lending business — and was made chairman in March 2021. Two IAS secretaries who formally flagged his conduct to the Congress government were then removed: Vikas Suralkar, who wrote to the Chief Secretary in September 2023 alleging misuse of authority by the Chairperson, was replaced the next day, and Latha Kumari, who recommended Article 317 action against him in a January 2024 letter to the Governor after his refusal to sign files stalled over 2,000 appointments, was told to withdraw the letter or go on leave, and was placed on paid leave on 7 February 2024. Separately, the Jharkhand High Court has appointed former judge Gautam Kumar Choudhary to monitor a CID Special Investigation Team probe into the 11th and 13th Jharkhand Public Service Commission and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission recruitment examinations, with Justice Deepak Roshan staying the termination of candidates appointed through those examinations pending the inquiry.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Recruitment examination → allegations of manipulation → appointments cancelled → candidates who may be innocent lose jobs → court stays terminations and puts a retired judge over the investigation

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Articles 315 to 323 are the whole constitutional scheme —** Article 315 provides for a Union Public Service Commission and a Public Service Commission for each State. Article 316 governs appointment and term of office of members, including that the chairman and members are appointed by the Governor in the case of a State Commission. Article 317 provides for removal and suspension — and critically, a

	chairman or member of a State Public Service Commission can be removed only by the President, on a reference to the Supreme Court and on that Court's report, on the ground of misbehaviour. Article 320 sets out the functions, and Article 323 requires the Commission to present an annual report to the Governor. 2. **The removal procedure is deliberately hard, and that is the design —** That a State's own government cannot remove the head of its Public Service Commission is not an oversight; it is the same insulation given to a judge, for the same reason — a recruitment body that can be dismissed by the executive it recruits for cannot be independent. The corollary, which this case exposes, is that when the office is misused the remedy is slow by construction. 3. **The constitutional protection does not bar criminal process —** Article 317's protection concerns removal from office. It does not create immunity from investigation or prosecution for offences under the general criminal law, which is why a CID probe can proceed against a sitting chairman while the removal question takes its own constitutional route. Conflating the two is a common error. 4. **Merit in public employment is an Article 16 guarantee —** Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. A rigged selection is therefore not only a criminal offence against the State; it is a constitutional injury to every candidate who competed honestly. That framing is what lifts a recruitment-scam answer above a law-and-order narrative.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Institutional integrity is the current governance question —** The examiner has moved from 'what does a PSC do' to 'what happens when the body meant to guarantee merit becomes the site of its subversion'. Two Commissions under investigation in one week is the kind of pairing a Mains question is written around. 2. **Articles 315-323 are dense with Prelims-grade distinctions —** Appointed by the Governor, removable only by the President on a Supreme Court reference, annual report to the Governor laid before the legislature — each is a discrete fact that a statement question can invert. 3. **Examination integrity now spans GS2 and GS4 together —** The same facts support a governance answer on institutional independence and an ethics answer on the duty of the honest candidate and the conflict faced by the investigating officer. Carry both readings.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Article 315 — provision for a Union Public Service Commission and a Public Service Commission for each State. ● Article 316 — appointment and term of office of members; the chairman and members of a State Public Service Commission are appointed by the Governor. ● Article 317 — removal and suspension of a member of a Public Service Commission; removal is by the President, on a reference to and report by the Supreme Court, on the ground of misbehaviour. ● Article 320 sets out the functions of Public Service Commissions; Article 323 requires the annual report to be presented to the Governor in the case of a State Commission. ● Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment under the State.
ANALYSIS	1. **The protection that guarantees independence also slows accountability —** Because a State PSC chairman can be removed only by the President on a Supreme Court reference, a State facing credible allegations cannot act quickly even when it wants to. The institutional design assumed the threat to a Commission came from outside — a

	government wanting pliant recruitment. It did not equally provide for the threat from inside. That asymmetry is the central analytical point in this card. 2. **The Jharkhand court's order identifies the real victims —** Cancelling an entire examination punishes the manipulators and the honest together, and the honest are the majority. By staying the terminations while appointing a retired judge to supervise the investigation, the High Court has separated two questions that administrations usually merge: whether the process was corrupted, and whether a particular appointee was complicit. Keeping them separate is the difference between justice and a purge. 3. **Retired-judge supervision is a symptom worth naming —** Placing a former High Court judge over a State CID investigation is an admission that the ordinary chain of supervision is not trusted in a case where the State's own senior officials may be implicated. It works, but it does not scale — there are more such cases than there are retired judges, and every such appointment marginally weakens the presumption that regular investigative machinery can handle its own. 4. **The economics of the scam explain its persistence —** A government job in a State with thin private employment carries a lifetime income premium, so the price a candidate's family will pay for a guaranteed selection is very large. Where the payoff is that high, integrity cannot rest on the honesty of individuals; it has to rest on process design — question-paper custody, randomised evaluation, machine-readable scoring, and an audit trail that makes a single official's discretion insufficient to change an outcome. 5. **Compare the Commissions with the national examination bodies —** The same week carried the Supreme Court's monitoring of NTA reform. The common finding across both is structural: temporary staffing, deputation-heavy establishments and outsourced processes create the seams through which manipulation enters. The remedy proposed for NTA — permanent staff and permanent offices — is the same remedy a State Commission needs. 6. **Two governments of opposite parties protected the same chairman, and the common factor is the office, not the ideology —** The BJP handpicked Sahukar as a non-official member in 2019 despite an unverifiable professional record, and elevated him to chairman in 2021 without the weeks of screening his predecessor underwent. The Congress government that followed then removed, in succession, the two IAS secretaries — Vikas Suralkar and Latha Kumari — who formally flagged his conduct, rather than acting on what they flagged. That two parties hostile to each other on almost everything else arrived at the identical outcome suggests the protection was structural rather than partisan: whichever party controls the State Cabinet also controls whether a Commission chairman is investigated and whether the official who exposes him keeps his post. The counter-view is that a chairman who has accumulated two years of leverage over sitting members and the secretariat becomes costly to remove regardless of who is in office; that explains the pattern without excusing it, because insulation built to stop one government from purging a Commission has no answer for two successive governments choosing, for their own reasons, not to act.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The constitutional insulation given to Public Service Commissions protects them from political interference but leaves internal corruption difficult to address. Critically examine."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Set out the scheme precisely before evaluating it —** Article 315 for the establishment, 316 for appointment by the Governor, 317 for removal only by the President on a Supreme Court reference, 320 for functions and 323 for the annual report. The argument depends on the asymmetry between who appoints and who can remove, so the reader must have both.

2. **Defend the insulation before criticising it —** Explain why removal was made hard: a recruitment body dismissible by the executive would be the executive's instrument. Any answer that treats Article 317 as a flaw has missed the purpose it serves.

3. **Then state the gap in one sentence —** The framers guarded against capture from outside and did not equally provide for decay from within, because they assumed the appointment process itself would filter for integrity.

4. **Propose remedies at three levels —** Appointment — a broad-based, statutory selection committee for the chairman rather than untrammelled executive choice; process — technology and randomisation that remove single-point discretion from evaluation; and disclosure — mandatory publication of the annual report with action-taken notes, since Article 323 already requires the report but not its consequence.

5. **Conclude by separating the institution from the incumbent —** Close with the Jharkhand court's distinction: protect appointees who competed honestly even while investigating the process that selected them. A conclusion that defends both integrity and the innocent reads as judgment rather than indignation.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Chief Secretary. The State PSC chairman is under CID investigation but cannot be removed except by the President on a Supreme Court reference. Results of three examinations are due. What do you do this week?

Approach: Separate what you can lawfully do from what you cannot. You cannot remove him, and attempting informal pressure will taint the eventual constitutional process, so do not try. What you can do is protect the pending examinations: request the Commission, in writing, to defer declaration of results until the investigation's scope is known; place the answer scripts and evaluation records in sealed custody with a joint inventory signed by the Commission and the State; and ask the Governor to initiate the Article 317 reference so the constitutional clock starts rather than waiting for the criminal case. Record every step, because the file will be read later by people looking for the moment the executive overreached.

Q2. Eight hundred appointees from a tainted examination are already in service. The political demand is to cancel all appointments. What is your advice?

Approach: Advise against blanket cancellation and give reasons that will survive a court. Blanket cancellation punishes the innocent majority, is almost always set aside, and destroys the State's own credibility as an employer. Propose instead a two-track approach: an evidence-led identification of the specific appointments linked to manipulation — through the paper trail, the score anomalies and the money trail — with individual show-cause notices and hearings; and a separate systemic audit of the examination process. Where evidence is specific, terminate and prosecute; where it is not, do not. Say plainly in the note that the political demand is understandable and legally unsustainable, because that sentence is the one the file needs when the matter is heard.

Q3. A young officer on your team is approached by a relative of a candidate offering money to reveal the interview panel's composition. He reports it to you. How do you handle it?

Approach: First, acknowledge what he did — reporting an approach is harder than refusing one, and if the first response is suspicion, nobody will report the next time. Then act on the substance: record the approach in writing the same day with names, time and content; report it to the investigating agency rather than handling it internally; and rotate the officer away from that file so neither he nor the process is compromised, making clear in writing that the rotation is protective and not adverse. Finally, treat the incident as information about your system: if the panel's composition is valuable enough to buy, then it is being kept secret by convention rather than by

	design, and the design needs fixing — randomised panel allocation disclosed only on the morning of the interview.

1.6 Governor Withholds Assent on a State Universities Bill While Tamil Nadu Refuses Land for Navodaya Schools

THE NEWS Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has sought clarifications from the State government on provisions of the Tamil Nadu Private Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was passed by the Assembly. Sources said the Bill is still under the Governor's consideration; a total of 13 Bills were passed by the Assembly in the recent Budget session, and the Governor has accorded assent to 12. The Tamil Nadu Private Universities Act, 2019 mandates a minimum of 100 acres of contiguous land for the establishment of a private university; the Amendment Bill seeks to reduce this to 12 acres in the Greater Chennai Corporation area, 18 acres in other municipal corporations and municipal councils, and 25 acres in other areas, and to reduce the permanent endowment fund requirement to ₹25 crore from ₹50 crore. Opposition parties and a cross-section of teachers said the Bill would lead to the commercialisation of education and undermine the State-run education system; Minister for Higher Education P. Viswanathan said the aim was to facilitate the establishment of world-class private universities. Separately, Tamil Nadu's Minister said the State would not provide land for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, citing the State's two-language policy and the Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act, 2006; the Supreme Court had given the State three months to comply with its direction of 15 December 2025 to identify land in each district for Navodaya schools, and Justice B.V. Nagarathna made oral observations in the matter.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

State legislates → Governor withholds or queries → State refuses a central scheme on language grounds → Supreme Court directs → federal friction moves from politics to the docket

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Article 200 governs what a Governor may do with a Bill —** When a Bill is presented to the Governor after passage by the State legislature, Article 200 gives four options: assent, withhold assent, return the Bill (if it is not a Money Bill) for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President. The first proviso requires that a returned Bill be sent back 'as soon as possible', and if the House passes it again, with or without amendment, the Governor 'shall not withhold assent'. The Article prescribes no time limit for the initial decision, and that silence is the entire source of the current class of disputes.

2. **Education is a Concurrent List subject and that is the root of the second dispute —** Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the Forty-second Amendment, which is why both the Union's Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme and the State's language policy have a legitimate constitutional footing. Article 254 resolves repugnancy between a Union and a State law on a Concurrent subject, but a scheme is not a law, so the conflict here is one of policy and cooperative implementation rather than of legislative competence.

3. **The language provisions are Articles 343 to 351, and Article 350A matters most here —** Article 350A directs every State and local authority to endeavour to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children belonging to linguistic minority groups. Tamil Nadu's two-language position rests politically on the history of the anti-Hindi agitations and legally on its own Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act, 2006, while the three-language formula is a policy recommendation, not a constitutional command.

4. **Navodaya Vidyalayas are a central scheme requiring State land —** The Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme provides residential schooling with reservation for rural children, and its establishment in a district depends on the State government identifying and transferring land. That dependence is what converts a policy disagreement into a justiciable dispute when a court directs identification of land.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Governor-State relations are among the most reliably examined topics —** Article 200, reservation for the President under Article 201, and the absence of a time limit have all been litigated and reported repeatedly over the last three years. A question on the Governor's discretion is close to an annual fixture in GS2. 2. **The 'cooperative federalism' phrase needs a counter-example —** Most answers use cooperative federalism as a compliment. The examiner rewards the candidate who can also name where cooperation breaks down and what the constitutional remedy is — which is precisely the Navodaya land dispute. 3. **Regulation of private higher education is an emerging area —** Land and endowment thresholds, and their dilution, connect the federalism question to the education-policy question. Questions on the National Education Policy's implementation increasingly ask about the regulatory architecture rather than its aspirations.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 200 — assent to Bills: the Governor may assent, withhold assent, return a Bill other than a Money Bill for reconsideration, or reserve it for the consideration of the President; on reconsideration and repassage the Governor shall not withhold assent. • Article 201 governs Bills reserved for the consideration of the President. • Education was transferred from the State List to the Concurrent List by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act. • Article 350A — endeavour to provide instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children of linguistic minority groups. • Article 351 casts a duty on the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language. • The Tamil Nadu Private Universities Act, 2019 required a minimum of 100 acres of contiguous land for a private university; the 2026 Amendment Bill proposes 12, 18 and 25 acres by area category.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Governor's silence is powerful precisely because it is unnamed —** Article 200 lists four things a Governor may do and does not list a fifth — keeping the Bill under consideration indefinitely while seeking clarifications. Because no time limit exists, a query is functionally a veto for as long as it remains unanswered, and unlike a return under the proviso it does not trigger the legislature's power to repass. Twelve assents and one query is a modest ratio, but the constitutional point does not depend on the ratio. 2. **The substance of the Bill is a genuine policy dispute, not merely a federal one —** Cutting the land requirement from 100 acres to 12 in a metropolitan corporation area is a large change, and both sides have a real case. The State's case is that a 100-acre rule makes a university impossible in a city and therefore protects incumbents rather than students. The critics' case is that land and endowment thresholds are the main barriers to fly-by-night operators, and that lowering both at once removes two filters simultaneously. An answer that notices the Bill also halves the endowment fund from ₹50 crore to ₹25 crore has read the whole provision. 3. **The language dispute is about whose policy binds whom —** The Union's scheme and the State's language law are both valid in their own spheres. What the Supreme Court's direction does is convert a political refusal into a legal obligation about land identification, without resolving the underlying question of the medium of instruction. That is judicial minimalism doing useful work — it separates the deliverable from the ideology. 4. **Federal friction has migrated from the floor of the House to the docket —** Both

	halves of this card end up in court: the Bill's fate is litigable if the delay continues, and the Navodaya question is already under judicial direction. Whatever one thinks of the merits, the systemic cost is that the Supreme Court is now the routine forum for Centre-State disagreement, which is slow, adversarial and bad at compromise — the three things intergovernmental councils exist to avoid. 5. **The institution designed for this is the Inter-State Council and it is barely used —** Article 263 provides for an Inter-State Council to inquire into and advise upon disputes and to investigate and discuss subjects of common interest. A body meeting regularly with the Centre and States around one table is the constitutionally intended forum for exactly the Navodaya kind of dispute. Its disuse is why the docket fills.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Disputes between the Union and the States are increasingly resolved in the courtroom rather than in the institutions designed for intergovernmental consultation. Critically examine with recent examples."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Name the constitutional provisions on both sides —** Article 200 and 201 for the Governor's role, the Concurrent List placement of education after the Forty-second Amendment, and Article 263 for the Inter-State Council. The answer's authority comes from placing the dispute in the scheme rather than describing the quarrel. 2. **Use two contrasting examples from the same day —** A Bill awaiting the Governor's decision without a time limit, and a State declining land for a central scheme until a court directs identification. One shows friction within a State's own legislative process; the other shows friction in scheme implementation. Together they cover both axes. 3. **Explain why litigation is the path of least resistance —** Courts give a determinate outcome, impose no obligation to compromise, and confer political benefit on whoever wins. Consultative bodies require concession and produce no headline. State this as an incentive problem rather than a moral failing. 4. **Set out the costs of judicialisation honestly —** Delay measured in years; binary outcomes where the dispute needed a negotiated middle; and an unelected forum making what are ultimately allocative choices. Balance this by conceding that in the absence of a time limit under Article 200, judicial intervention has been the only effective discipline. 5. **Conclude with a reform that is modest and plausible —** A statutory or judicially read-in reasonable period for decisions under Article 200; regular, calendared meetings of the Inter-State Council with published agendas; and a standing Centre-State mechanism for scheme-implementation disputes so that land, funds and language questions are negotiated before they are pleaded.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are Secretary, Higher Education in a State proposing to cut the land requirement for private universities from 100 acres to 12 in the city. How do you protect quality while making the change?** ***Approach:*** Accept that acreage is a poor proxy for quality and replace it rather than simply removing it. Land tells you nothing about faculty, laboratories or outcomes; it only filters by capital. So pair the reduction with substantive conditions that are harder to fake — minimum built-up space per student, a faculty-student ratio verified annually, mandatory disclosure of faculty qualifications and vacancies, a fee-refund guarantee, and an endowment that is escrowed rather than merely declared. Note honestly in the file that halving the endowment from ₹50 crore to ₹25 crore at the same time weakens the one remaining financial filter, and recommend that if acreage falls, the endowment should not. Build in a sunset review after five years with published outcome data.

Q2. As District Collector, you are directed by the Court to identify land for a Navodaya Vidyalaya, and the State government's position is that it will not cooperate. What is your course?

Approach: A direction of the Court binds you as an officer, and the State's policy position does not relieve you of it, so do the identification and report it — that is a factual exercise, not a political act. Keep the two separate on the file: your report identifies suitable government land with area, encumbrance status and access; it does not express a view on the language policy, which is not your jurisdiction. Send the report simultaneously to the State government and to the authority the Court named, so you cannot be accused of concealment either way. If the State subsequently declines transfer, that refusal is the government's and it is on record as such — an officer's obligation is to make the decision visible, not to make it.

Q3. Teachers' associations and Opposition parties demand that you, as Secretary, release the Governor's queries on the Bill to the public. Do you?

Approach: Not unilaterally. Communications between the Governor and the government on a Bill under Article 200 are part of an ongoing constitutional process, and selective release by a civil servant would make the officer a participant in the political dispute. The correct course is to place the request before the government for a decision, advise that transparency generally serves the institution better than secrecy, and point out that if the matter is litigated the correspondence will become public anyway on far less favourable terms. What you should refuse in all circumstances is a briefing to one side, on background, about the contents — that is the route by which an officer's usefulness to every future government ends.

2. Economy

Five stories that all turn on the same question: who pays for a public good once it stops being free. A pension floor raised after twelve years, a payment system that has begun to charge, a growth forecast raised in the middle of a war, a holding company ordered to list, and the first district-level map of joblessness the country has ever had.

2.1 EPFO Wage Ceiling Raised From ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 After Twelve Years

THE NEWS The Union Cabinet approved raising the wage ceiling for mandatory coverage under the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 per month, the ninth revision since the scheme began and the first since September 2014. The government's own release states that over 51 lakh additional employees are expected to come under mandatory EPFO coverage, which currently has around 7.98 crore contributing members across 7.68 lakh establishments, and that the Employees' Pension Scheme provides pension to approximately 82 lakh pensioners. The release puts the additional annual government expenditure at approximately ₹11,339 crore, up from an existing ₹10,250 crore, with a five-year estimate of about ₹56,696 crore. Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya cited a government survey showing the average salary in private establishments at ₹23,000 as the basis for the increase. Those in the ₹15,000-₹25,000 wage slab will now be covered under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 2026. The Hindu's editorial noted that the EPS minimum pension of ₹1,000 fixed in September 2014 has not been revised, that about 45% of the nearly 82 lakh pensioners receive ₹1,000 or less, and that in March 2026 the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour reminded the government that the existing minimum pension amount is inadequate to meet even the basic needs of pensioners. Before assuming office at the Centre in 2014, the BJP had urged the Congress-led UPA to keep the minimum pension at ₹3,000 and index it to inflation. Minimum wages for unskilled workers already exceed ₹15,000 in Delhi at ₹17,800, Maharashtra at ₹17,000 and Karnataka at ₹16,800; trade unions including AITUC have demanded ₹30,000.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Ceiling frozen at ₹15,000 for 12 years → wage inflation pushes workers above it → they fall outside mandatory cover → ceiling raised to ₹25,000 → 51 lakh brought in, but the pension floor stays at ₹1,000

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Three schemes run off the same contribution —** The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 is the parent statute, and it carries three schemes: the Employees' Provident Fund for retirement savings, the Employees' Pension Scheme for a monthly pension after retirement, and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme for a lump-sum life cover. A single deduction funds all three, which is why a change in the wage ceiling moves all three at once. 2. **How the 12% splits is the fact most candidates get wrong —** The employee contributes 12% of basic wages, and the entire employee share goes to the provident fund. The employer also contributes 12%, but that share is split — 8.33% to the Employees' Pension Scheme, subject to the wage ceiling, and the balance 3.67% to the provident fund. Because the pension contribution is capped at the ceiling, raising the ceiling directly raises future pension entitlement, not just the savings balance. 3. **EDLI is the forgotten third leg —** The Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme provides a life cover to the member's family, funded by an employer contribution of 0.5% of wages. Reported cover ranges from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹7 lakh. Raising the ceiling raises the insured value for the newly covered worker, which is a real gain that the pension debate usually drowns out. 4. **Article 41 and Article 43 are the constitutional backdrop —** Article 41 directs the State to make effective provision for securing public assistance in cases of old age, and Article 43 to secure a living wage and conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life. Both are Directive Principles — non-justiciable, but they are the stated constitutional basis for statutory social security, and an answer that cites them locates the reform correctly.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS	1. **Social security coverage is a standing GS2 and GS3 theme —** The syllabus carries both

(TREND)	'issues relating to development and management of social sector relating to health, education, human resources' and 'inclusive growth'. Formal-sector pension coverage sits at the junction, and the examiner has asked about the informal-formal divide repeatedly. 2. **This is a rare story with clean official numbers —** 51 lakh new members, 7.98 crore contributors, 7.68 lakh establishments, 82 lakh pensioners, ₹11,339 crore a year. Government releases seldom hand over a full set like this, and the examiner rewards the candidate who uses the official figure rather than the newspaper's paraphrase. 3. **The gap between coverage and adequacy is the examinable tension —** UPSC likes reforms that solve one problem and leave the adjacent one untouched. Coverage widened; the minimum pension did not move. That asymmetry is the answer's spine.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The parent statute is the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, administered by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. • The Act carries three schemes — the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, the Employees' Pension Scheme and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme. • Employee contribution is 12% of basic wages, all of which goes to the provident fund; of the employer's 12%, 8.33% goes to the Employees' Pension Scheme subject to the wage ceiling and 3.67% to the provident fund. • The EDLI contribution is 0.5% of wages, payable by the employer. • The statutory wage ceiling for mandatory coverage was ₹6,500 from June 2001, raised to ₹15,000 in September 2014, and now to ₹25,000; this is the ninth revision since the scheme began. • The EPS minimum pension of ₹1,000 per month was fixed in September 2014 and has not since been revised. • Article 41 — right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases, including old age; Article 43 — living wage for workers. Both are Directive Principles of State Policy.
ANALYSIS	1. **A frozen ceiling shrinks a scheme without anyone deciding to shrink it —** The ceiling is a nominal number in an economy with nominal wage growth. Held at ₹15,000 from 2014 to 2026, it quietly excluded every worker whose pay crossed it, so mandatory coverage narrowed each year without a single policy decision to narrow it. This is the general lesson worth carrying into any answer on welfare design: an un-indexed threshold is a cut disguised as continuity, and the same logic applies to the ₹1,000 pension floor, to income-tax slabs and to poverty lines. 2. **The government's own survey number sets the ceiling below the median it cites —** The Labour Minister cited an average private-establishment salary of ₹23,000. Setting the ceiling at ₹25,000 therefore captures the average worker but leaves limited headroom — at any reasonable wage growth the new ceiling will be binding again within a few years. A design that indexed the ceiling to a wage index would not need a Cabinet decision every twelve years. 3. **Coverage is not adequacy, and the pension floor proves it —** About 45% of nearly 82 lakh pensioners receive ₹1,000 or less, a figure fixed in 2014 and unchanged. A Parliamentary Standing Committee said in March 2026 that this does not meet basic needs. Bringing 51 lakh more people into a scheme whose floor is inadequate improves their eventual entitlement but does nothing for those already drawing it. Both halves belong in the same answer.

	4. **The employer's incentive runs the other way and that determines outcomes —** For every newly covered worker the employer's cost rises by 12% of wages plus the EDLI share. The predictable responses are restructuring pay so that 'basic wages' stay low while allowances rise, and greater use of contract labour outside the establishment. Whether the 51 lakh figure is realised depends less on the notification than on enforcement of what counts as basic wages. 5. **State minimum wages had already overtaken the central ceiling —** Unskilled minimum wages of ₹17,800 in Delhi, ₹17,000 in Maharashtra and ₹16,800 in Karnataka mean that in those States the lowest legally payable wage exceeded the threshold for mandatory social security. A worker could be simultaneously entitled to a statutory minimum wage and outside statutory pension cover — an incoherence between two arms of the same labour ministry, and the sharpest single illustration for an answer on policy fragmentation. 6. **The fiscal number is small relative to the promise —** ₹11,339 crore a year, up from ₹10,250 crore, is a modest increase for a reform described as covering 51 lakh people — because the government's contribution is confined to a share of the pension scheme, while the bulk of the cost falls on employers. Reading the fiscal figure as the measure of the reform's size would be an error; the real transfer here is private, not budgetary.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Widening the coverage of a social security scheme without revising its benefit floor addresses inclusion but not adequacy. Critically examine with reference to India's formal-sector pension architecture."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Open with the architecture, not the announcement —** One sentence on the 1952 Act and its three schemes, and the 12% split with 8.33% going to pension subject to the ceiling. The reader must understand why a ceiling change is a pension change before any evaluation makes sense. 2. **Make the inclusion case with the official numbers —** 51 lakh additional members against 7.98 crore existing contributors, the first revision in twelve years, and the ₹23,000 average wage that made the old ceiling obsolete. Concede without hedging that this is a real and overdue expansion. 3. **Then make the adequacy case with equal specificity —** A ₹1,000 minimum pension fixed in 2014, 45% of 82 lakh pensioners at or below it, and a Parliamentary Standing Committee recording in March 2026 that this is insufficient. Adequacy is a separate variable and it did not move. 4. **Name the structural fix rather than asking for more money —** Indexation. A ceiling indexed to a wage index and a minimum pension indexed to inflation would remove the need for a political decision every decade and would prevent the silent erosion between decisions. This is the argument that distinguishes a policy answer from a demand. 5. **Close on the population the debate leaves out —** All of this concerns the organised sector. The larger share of India's workforce is outside any contributory scheme, so a conclusion that gestures at the informal sector — and at the difficulty of contribution-based cover where there is no identifiable employer — shows the examiner you know the boundary of what was actually reformed.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner. Within a month of the new ceiling, employers in your region begin restructuring salaries so that 'basic wages' fall and allowances rise, keeping contributions flat. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Treat it as a compliance question with an evidentiary answer, not a moral

one. Issue a circular restating what constitutes basic wages for contribution purposes, then select establishments where the basic-to-gross ratio fell sharply in the quarter after the notification and take those up for inspection first — the data is already in your returns, so the targeting costs nothing. Give the employer a hearing and an opportunity to correct before assessment, because a large volume of contested assessments will clog the appellate machinery and delay the very workers you are protecting. Publish, in aggregate and without naming, the finding that a certain percentage of establishments restructured pay — that single published number does more deterrence than a hundred individual orders.

Q2. A small manufacturer with 40 workers tells you that the extra 12% on the newly covered workers will force him to move half of them to a contractor. He is not bluffing. What is your response as the officer he is talking to?

Approach: Do not pretend the cost is imaginary; it is real and for a thin-margin unit it is material. But be exact about what the law permits: workers engaged through a contractor for the establishment's own work remain covered, and the principal employer carries the liability, so the restructuring he is describing does not achieve what he thinks it achieves and will produce arrears with damages later. Say that plainly and early, because he is likelier to comply if he learns it from you now than from an assessment order in three years. Then be useful — point him to the phased-compliance and employment-linked schemes he may be eligible for, and offer a facilitation visit rather than an inspection. An officer whose only tool is penalty will find the sector informalising around him.

Q3. Pensioners in your jurisdiction, many drawing ₹1,000, protest that the ceiling was raised for future members while their pension was left untouched. They want you to forward a demand. What do you do?

Approach: Forward it, accurately and on the record. The minimum pension is fixed by the government, not by you, and pretending otherwise would be dishonest; but a field officer who refuses to transmit a grievance because he cannot grant it has misunderstood his role. Prepare a factual note with the number of pensioners in your region at or below ₹1,000, their age profile, and the years since the amount was last revised, and send it up through the proper channel with the representation attached. Meet the delegation, tell them exactly what you have sent and to whom, and give them the reference number. What people can bear is a slow answer; what they cannot bear is discovering that nobody carried the question upward.

2.2 UPI Begins to Charge — and Merchants Have Already Found the Workaround

THE NEWS From 15 October, regular merchant payments above ₹2,000 will attract a 0.4% merchant discount rate, capped at ₹300 for transactions of ₹75,000 or more. The National Payments Corporation of India has no immediate plans for a special daily cap on repeated UPI payments to the same merchant, a measure that could prevent businesses from splitting large bills into transactions of ₹2,000 or less. A merchant collecting ₹6,000 would pay ₹24 on one UPI payment; the merchant could instead request three payments of ₹2,000. NPCI's own published figures state that all person-to-person transactions remain free, that only 4% of person-to-merchant transactions are above ₹2,000, that essential and government services are free up to ₹2,000 with a flat ₹5 MDR above that, that all RuPay debit card transactions are free, and that small vendors receiving up to ₹1 lakh via UPI per month are exempt from MDR. NPCI also states that India has 120 crore mobile users but 56.5 crore UPI users, and that UPI handles 49% of the world's real-time instant payments. RBI Deputy Governor Shirish Chandra Murmu said concerns that MDR would spur a surge in cash transactions are unlikely to materialise and amount to an initial apprehension, noting the apparent paradox of rising digital transactions alongside rising cash in circulation, which he attributed to cash serving both as a means of transaction and a store of value. The All India Consumer Products Distribution Federation, which says it has around 450,000 FMCG distributors as members, wrote to the Prime Minister opposing the MDR, saying the burden should not fall disproportionately on traders. The Congress and the chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, Bhartruhari Mahtab, are in public dispute over

> whether Opposition MPs on the panel endorsed the recommendation; Congress MP Manish Tewari said the committee's recommendation was only to 'explore' a revenue model.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Zero MDR made UPI universal → the system's cost had no payer → 0.4% MDR above ₹2,000 → merchants split bills below the threshold → NPCI declines a daily cap → the fee is avoidable by design

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **What MDR actually is, in plain terms —** The merchant discount rate is the fee a merchant pays, as a percentage of the transaction, to the chain of institutions that moves the money — the bank that hosts the merchant's account, the bank that hosts the customer's account, the payment app and the network. It is not a tax and it does not go to the government. UPI was built with this fee set at zero, which is why adoption was explosive and why the question of who funds the plumbing was never settled. 2. **NPCI is not a regulator and not a government department —** The National Payments Corporation of India is an umbrella organisation for retail payments, set up as a not-for-profit company under the Companies Act at the initiative of the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association. It operates UPI, IMPS, RuPay, NACH, AePS and FASTag. The Reserve Bank regulates it under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007. Calling NPCI a regulator, which is a common slip, inverts the relationship. 3. **The zero-MDR mandate came from tax law, not payments law —** The obligation on prescribed businesses to offer low-cost digital modes without charging MDR was introduced through Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act read with Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act. That is why the debate over reintroducing MDR has run through the Finance Ministry and a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance rather than through the payments regulator alone. 4. **The ₹2,000 threshold matters more than the 0.4% rate —** Because only 4% of person-to-merchant transactions exceed ₹2,000 on NPCI's own figures, the fee applies to a small slice of volume — but a much larger slice of value. The design deliberately protects small-ticket retail and charges high-value commerce, which is a defensible principle. Its weakness is that the threshold is per transaction, not per day or per merchant.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Digital payments have moved from 'achievement' to 'policy problem' —** Earlier questions asked about financial inclusion and the JAM trinity. The current question is about the sustainability of a public digital infrastructure — who pays, who captures the value, and what a public utility built by a not-for-profit company owes its users. That is a more demanding question and it is where the exam has gone. 2. **Digital Public Infrastructure is the framing UPSC now uses —** Aadhaar, UPI and the account aggregator framework are increasingly examined together as 'DPI'. An answer that can explain the economics of DPI — near-zero marginal cost, enormous fixed cost, positive externalities — is answering the question behind the question. 3. **The parliamentary-committee dispute is itself examinable —** A public disagreement over what a Standing Committee recommended is a live illustration for a question on the role and limitations of departmentally related standing committees, particularly the convention that committee reports are collective and dissent must be recorded.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The National Payments Corporation of India is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation for retail payments, promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association, and operating UPI, IMPS, RuPay, NACH, AePS and FASTag. • Payment systems are regulated by the Reserve Bank under the Payment and

	Settlement Systems Act, 2007. ● Section 269SU of the Income-tax Act requires prescribed businesses to provide facility for accepting payment through prescribed electronic modes; Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act bars charges on such prescribed modes. ● Under the framework effective 15 October, MDR of 0.4% applies to person-to-merchant UPI payments above ₹2,000, capped at ₹300 for transactions of ₹75,000 or more. ● Per NPCI, all person-to-person UPI transactions and all RuPay debit card transactions remain free, and merchants receiving up to ₹1 lakh per month via UPI are exempt. ● Per NPCI, only 4% of person-to-merchant UPI transactions are above ₹2,000, and UPI handles 49% of the world's real-time instant payments.
ANALYSIS	1. **A threshold priced per transaction invites splitting, and everyone knows it —** A merchant collecting ₹6,000 pays ₹24 on one payment and nothing on three payments of ₹2,000. The arbitrage requires no technology and no intent to defraud — only a request to the customer. NPCI's decision not to impose a daily cap for now means the fee is, in effect, optional for any merchant willing to inconvenience the customer slightly. A revenue measure that the payer can avoid by rearranging the same payment is not a revenue measure; it is a tax on inattention. 2. **Splitting has costs that the fee was meant to avoid —** Three transactions instead of one triples the message load on a system already carrying the world's largest volume of real-time payments — which is precisely the infrastructure cost the MDR was introduced to fund. If the response to the fee is fragmentation, the fee raises less revenue while raising the cost it was meant to cover. This is the sharpest analytical point in the story and it is worth making explicitly. 3. **The distributional politics are genuinely contested —** The distributors' federation argues that thin-margin traders cannot absorb 0.4%, and on FMCG distribution margins that is arithmetically plausible. Against that, the merchant is the party that receives the payment, saves the cash-handling cost, and gains the credit history that the transaction record creates. A serious answer states both and notes that the incidence of the fee will not stay where the rule places it: in competitive retail it passes to the consumer, in concentrated retail it is absorbed. 4. **The Deputy Governor's cash paradox deserves more than a mention —** Digital transactions and currency in circulation have both risen. The explanation offered — cash serves as a store of value as well as a means of transaction — is the standard one and it is probably right. But it also means the usual argument for MDR, that it will not push people back to cash because cash is inconvenient, applies only to the transactional motive. It says nothing about whether a fee at the till nudges a merchant to prefer cash, which is a different behaviour from a consumer hoarding notes. 5. **The exemption structure shows the policy is redistributive by design —** Person-to-person free, small vendors under ₹1 lakh a month free, essential and government services free up to ₹2,000, RuPay free. The fee is aimed at high-value commercial transactions and at the organised merchant. That is a coherent design and defenders should say so, because the debate is being conducted as though a flat charge had been imposed on every UPI payment, which is not what the framework does. 6. **The real question is what the country wants UPI to be —** If UPI is public infrastructure like a road, the cost belongs on the budget and MDR is a user charge on a public good. If it is a private payments utility that happens to be run by a not-for-profit, then users must fund it and zero MDR was always a subsidy with an expiry date. India has not

	decided which, and every argument in this dispute is really an argument about that unanswered question.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The reintroduction of a merchant discount rate on high-value UPI transactions raises the question of how a digital public infrastructure should be financed. Discuss."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Define the terms before taking a position —** One line each on what MDR is, what NPCI is and is not, and why zero MDR was mandated through tax law. Most answers on this topic fail because the reader cannot tell whether the candidate knows who charges whom. 2. **State the financing problem neutrally —** Near-zero marginal cost per transaction, very large fixed and security costs, enormous positive externalities in formalisation and credit access. Any of three payers — the merchant, the consumer or the exchequer — can fund it, and each choice has a different distributional consequence. 3. **Evaluate the chosen design on its own terms —** Threshold at ₹2,000, rate 0.4%, cap at ₹300, exemptions for P2P, small vendors and RuPay. Concede the design is progressive in intent. Then make the splitting argument, with the ₹6,000 example, to show that a per-transaction threshold is the wrong instrument for a per-merchant objective. 4. **Offer a specific alternative rather than a complaint —** A monthly turnover threshold rather than a per-transaction one; or a flat per-transaction charge above a value rather than a percentage, which removes the incentive to split; or explicit budgetary support with a published subsidy figure so the cost is visible and debated annually. 5. **Conclude on the constitutional-scale question —** End by naming what is really unresolved: whether UPI is public infrastructure to be funded from general revenue or a utility to be funded by its users. Say that the country should decide that question openly rather than through the drift of exemptions, because a decision made by drift is the one nobody can defend later.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Department of Financial Services. Reports come in that merchants are routinely splitting bills to stay under ₹2,000. Do you recommend a daily cap?** ***Approach:*** Recommend against a per-merchant daily cap as the first instrument, because it punishes legitimate repeat customers and is hard to distinguish from genuine multiple purchases at a kirana store. Recommend instead moving the trigger from the transaction to the merchant: apply MDR above a monthly received-value threshold, which is already the basis of the small-vendor exemption, so the fee follows the size of the business rather than the size of the bill. Pair it with a data exercise before any rule change — ask NPCI for the distribution of same-merchant same-customer transactions within a short window, before and after 15 October. Rules written from anecdote get litigated; rules written from distribution data survive. **Q2. A consumers' association complains that merchants are refusing UPI above ₹2,000 and demanding cash. What enforcement do you have, and what do you use?** ***Approach:*** The legal hook exists — prescribed businesses must offer the prescribed electronic modes and cannot levy a charge on the customer for them — so refusal by a covered merchant, or a surcharge passed to the customer, is actionable. But enforcement against lakhs of small merchants is neither feasible nor wise. Use the visible instruments: a clear public statement that customer surcharging is prohibited, a simple complaint route inside the payment apps themselves where the evidence already lives, and action against a small number of large merchants where the pattern is systematic. The objective is to set the norm, not to prosecute the market.

Q3. The Department is asked to publish how much MDR revenue actually flows and to whom. Some in the industry resist. What is your position?

Approach: Publish. A fee levied on the public for a public digital infrastructure must be accountable, and the argument against disclosure — commercial confidentiality across banks, apps and the network — can be met by publishing aggregates rather than firm-level splits. The practical reason is stronger than the principled one: the entire political controversy exists because nobody can see where the money goes, and in the absence of a published number every participant is free to assert that someone else is capturing it. Recommend an annual published statement of MDR collected, its allocation across the chain, and the infrastructure spend it funded.

2.3 Moody's Raises India's FY27 Growth Forecast to 7% While the War Pushes Crude Past $100

THE NEWS Moody's Ratings raised India's FY27 economic growth forecast to 7% from 6% previously, citing the economy's resilience to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, while cautioning that higher energy prices and erratic weather could pose inflation risks. India's gross domestic product grew 7.8% in FY26, and GDP growth rose to 8.2% year-on-year in the first six months of 2026 compared with 7.3% in calendar year 2025. Moody's projects FY27 inflation at 4.8%, compared with 2.4% in FY26, and said the increased diversification of India's crude import sources, sizeable foreign exchange reserves, strong domestic demand and responsible monetary policy provide important buffers, while higher energy and fertiliser import costs, softer external demand and weaker remittance inflows from the Middle East could widen the current account deficit. Crude oil prices have risen sharply since the start of the conflict on 28 February, climbing above $100 per barrel from around $73 before the war. The government has estimated the debt-to-GDP ratio for FY27 at 55.6% of GDP, lower than 56.1% for FY26, and aims to reduce the ratio to 50% by March 2031. Separately, net direct tax collections rose nearly 13% year-on-year to ₹12.10 lakh crore as of 17 September; gross direct tax collections were ₹14,32,437 crore, up 15.19%; refunds were ₹2,20,027 crore, up 29.19%; advance tax was ₹5,21,941 crore, up 18%, of which corporate advance tax was ₹4,16,084 crore, up 18.09%, and non-corporate advance tax ₹1,05,857 crore, up 9.24%. Securities Transaction Tax collections rose 53% to ₹40,214 crore between 1 April and 17 September, on the back of massive futures and options trading and increased retail participation, following a 150% increase in STT rates on equity futures effective 1 April 2026. At a conference of State finance ministers, economic affairs secretary Anuradha Thakur said private investment is critical to realising the Viksit Bharat vision; States have budgeted around ₹11 lakh crore as capital outlay, equivalent to about 2.4% of gross state domestic product, against a target of 3% by 2031-32. N.K. Singh, chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, said the 16th Finance Commission's trajectory of bringing general government debt down to 73.1% by FY31 remains 'somewhat daunting', and that gross domestic savings should rise to 38-40% of GDP from around 34%. Kotak Mahindra Bank founder Uday Kotak said the gross gold import bill could reach $88-90 billion in FY27.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

War from 28 February → crude from $73 to above $100 → import bill and fertiliser costs rise → inflation projected 4.8% against 2.4% → yet growth forecast raised to 7% on domestic demand

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Fiscal responsibility rests on the FRBM Act and Article 292 —** Article 292 permits Union borrowing upon the security of the Consolidated Fund of India within limits fixed by Parliament, and Article 293 governs State borrowing, including the requirement of Union consent where a State is indebted to the Centre. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003 operationalises the discipline. Debt-to-GDP targets, and the general government debt trajectory the Finance Commission speaks of, live inside that framework.

2. **Finance Commissions are constitutional, not statutory —** Article 280 requires the President to constitute a Finance Commission every fifth year or earlier, to recommend the distribution of net proceeds of taxes between the Union and the States, the principles governing grants-in-aid, and measures to augment State Consolidated Funds to supplement the resources of panchayats and municipalities. The 15th Commission

	was chaired by N.K. Singh; the 16th is the one whose debt trajectory is under discussion. 3. **Securities Transaction Tax is a transaction tax, not a capital gains tax —** STT is levied on the value of taxable securities transactions under the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2004, collected by the exchange and payable regardless of whether the trade is profitable. A 150% increase in the rate on equity futures effective 1 April 2026 explains a 53% jump in collections better than any change in market direction does. 4. **Advance tax is the economy's forward-looking signal —** Advance tax is paid in instalments during the year on estimated income under Section 208 onwards of the Income-tax Act. Because it is based on the taxpayer's own assessment of income yet to be earned, it is read as an early indicator of the health of the tax base — which is exactly how the CBDT figures were presented.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Growth-with-external-shock is the classic GS3 question —** The syllabus carries 'Indian economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development'. An external energy shock that raises inflation while growth accelerates is the textbook case for asking a candidate to separate a supply shock from a demand cycle. 2. **Fiscal federalism questions want numbers now —** States' ₹11 lakh crore capital outlay at 2.4% of GSDP against a 3% target, and a general government debt path to 73.1% by FY31, are precisely the kind of specifics that lift an answer on Centre-State finance above generalities. 3. **Rating-agency forecasts are evidence, not authority —** The examiner rewards a candidate who uses a forecast as a data point and interrogates its assumptions, rather than one who cites it as proof. Moody's own caveats — energy prices, erratic weather, remittances — are the interrogation, already supplied.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 280 requires the constitution of a Finance Commission every fifth year or earlier; Article 281 concerns the laying of its recommendations before Parliament. • Article 292 governs borrowing by the Government of India; Article 293 governs borrowing by States, including the requirement of Union consent where the State is indebted to the Centre. • The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act was enacted in 2003. • Securities Transaction Tax was introduced by the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2004 and is levied on the value of taxable securities transactions. • Advance tax is payable in instalments during the financial year on estimated income; corporate and non-corporate advance tax are reported separately by the Central Board of Direct Taxes. • The government's stated aim is to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 50% by March 2031.
ANALYSIS	1. **Growth up and inflation up together points to a supply shock, not overheating —** An economy overheating from excess demand shows rising inflation and rising growth with a widening current account deficit driven by import volume. Here the inflation source is named — crude from $73 to above $100 after 28 February — and it raises the import bill through price, not volume. That distinction determines the correct policy response: a demand-driven inflation calls for tightening, an imported supply shock largely has to be absorbed, and tightening into it costs growth without touching the cause.

	2. **The buffers Moody's names are the ones that actually matter —** Diversified crude sourcing, large reserves, strong domestic demand. Each is a specific defence against a specific channel of the shock — sourcing against supply disruption, reserves against currency pressure, domestic demand against a collapse in external orders. An answer that lists these as generic strengths misses that they are matched to the threat. 3. **The current account is where the shock will actually show —** Higher energy and fertiliser import costs, softer external demand and weaker remittances from the Middle East all push the current account deficit the same way, and remittances are the underrated one: a war in the region that employs a large Indian workforce reduces the inflow that normally offsets the oil bill. That is a second-order effect and it is the kind of link the examiner rewards. 4. **The tax numbers are strong but one of them is an artefact —** Net direct tax up 13% and advance tax up 18% do indicate a healthy base. But STT up 53% follows a 150% rate increase on equity futures effective 1 April 2026 — the collection rose because the rate rose, and reading it as evidence of market health inverts cause and effect. Separating a rate effect from a base effect is a habit worth carrying into every revenue question. 5. **Refunds rising faster than collections is worth a sentence —** Refunds up 29.19% against gross collections up 15.19% compresses the net number. Faster refunds are good administration and improve taxpayer cash flow, but they also mean the headline net figure understates gross buoyancy in the year they accelerate. A candidate who notices this is reading the table rather than the headline. 6. **The fiscal ambition depends on savings that have not yet risen —** N.K. Singh's point that gross domestic savings must rise from about 34% to 38-40% of GDP is the binding constraint behind every investment target. States at 2.4% of GSDP capital outlay against a 3% goal, a general government debt path called 'somewhat daunting', and a potential $88-90 billion gold import bill all describe the same problem — savings that exist but are locked in an unproductive asset rather than intermediated into investment.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"An external energy price shock tests the quality of a country's macroeconomic buffers more than the pace of its growth. Examine in the context of India's current position."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Establish the shock and its transmission channels first —** Crude from around $73 to above $100 after 28 February, feeding into the import bill, fertiliser costs, headline inflation projected at 4.8% against 2.4%, and the current account. Name the channels before evaluating the defences. 2. **Distinguish supply-side inflation from demand-side inflation explicitly —** This is the analytical move that separates a good answer from an average one. Say why the distinction matters for the policy response, and note that monetary tightening addresses second-round effects and expectations, not the price of imported crude. 3. **Assess each buffer against the channel it defends —** Diversified sourcing against supply disruption; reserves and the exchange rate against the financing of a wider deficit; domestic demand against weak external orders; and fiscal space, which is the weakest of the four given a debt-to-GDP ratio of 55.6%. 4. **Bring in the fiscal and savings constraint —** States' capital outlay at 2.4% of GSDP against a 3% target, the general government debt trajectory to 73.1% by FY31, and the need for savings to rise from 34% to 38-40%. This is where the answer connects the short-run shock to the long-run development question. 5. **Conclude on what would actually change the exposure —** End with the structural

	point: buffers manage a shock, they do not reduce exposure to it. Reducing exposure means the energy transition, strategic reserves, fertiliser self-sufficiency and deeper financial intermediation of household savings — the things that make the next $100 barrel matter less.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Secretary, Department of Fertilisers. Crude above $100 has raised the landed cost of imported urea and DAP well past budgeted subsidy. The rabi season begins in October. What do you do first?** ***Approach:*** Secure the physical availability before you solve the money, because a farmer who cannot get a bag in October is a problem that compounds and a subsidy overrun is a problem that can be settled in a supplementary. So: confirm contracted quantities and shipping schedules for the rabi window, map district-level opening stocks against last year's rabi consumption, and move stocks early to the deficit districts while freight is available. In parallel, place an honest note before the Finance Ministry projecting the overrun at current prices with a sensitivity range rather than a single number, because a single number that is wrong destroys credibility for the next request. And resist the temptation to manage the shortfall by quietly delaying payments to companies — that transfers the crisis to the supply chain and shows up as non-availability three months later. **Q2. As a Principal Secretary (Finance) in a State, you are asked to raise capital outlay from 2.4% to 3% of GSDP in a year when revenue is under pressure. Where do you find it?** ***Approach:*** Not from across-the-board cuts, which fall on the schemes with the least political protection rather than the least value. Do three things instead. First, audit the capital budget for projects that have been carried for years with negligible expenditure — the released-but-unspent pool is usually large enough to matter, and closing dead projects frees both money and administrative attention. Second, shift the composition of committed expenditure where possible: subsidies that are untargeted cost more and deliver less than the same rupee spent on assets. Third, be honest with the Centre that a 3% target is unreachable without either higher transfers or higher borrowing headroom under Article 293, and say which you are asking for. A State that pretends to accept a target it cannot meet ends the year with both an unmet target and a broken credibility. **Q3. A newspaper reports that your department's tax collections are 'booming' on the back of a 53% jump in STT. A minister wants to cite it. What do you brief?** ***Approach:*** Brief plainly that the STT number is largely a rate effect — the rate on equity futures rose 150% with effect from 1 April 2026 — and that citing it as evidence of economic buoyancy will not survive the first informed question. Offer the figures that do support the claim: advance tax up 18%, corporate advance tax up 18.09%, and gross collections up 15.19%, all of which are base effects. This is the routine, unglamorous duty of an officer briefing a political principal: supply the accurate version of the good news rather than the flattering one, because the flattering version has a shelf life of about a week and the officer who supplied it is remembered longer than that.

2.4 RBI Orders Tata Sons Towards Listing, and the Boardroom Splits Over It

THE NEWS Tata Sons has begun preparing for a public listing after the Reserve Bank of India directed it to do so, with February 2027 emerging as an approximate internal target for a market debut; the RBI directive is dated 11 September, and the RBI rejected Tata Sons' application to surrender its core investment company registration. Under the RBI's scale-based regulatory framework, an NBFC classified in the upper layer is required to list on a recognised stock exchange within three years of being so identified; Tata Sons was classified as an upper-layer NBFC in September 2022. Ownership of Tata Sons is reported as Tata Trusts 65.9%, the Shapoorji Pallonji Group 18.4%, Tata Group companies 12.9% and seven individuals and others 2.8%; within the Trusts, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust holds 28.0%, Sir Ratan Tata Trust 23.6%, JRD Tata Trust 4.0%, Tata Education Trust 3.7%, Tata Social Welfare Trust 3.7%, RD Tata Trust 2.2%, MK Tata Trust 0.6% and Sarvajanik Seva Trust 0.1%. Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata has challenged the validity of the 17 September Tata Sons board meeting at which N. Chandrasekaran was reappointed chairman by a 4-1 majority, writing to company secretary Suprakash Mukhopadhyay that the reappointment was 'null and void ab initio' and that voting was subject to three conditions: that the company secretary would study the issue and advise the board on whether Article 121 or 118 of the Articles of Association applied; that the reappointment would first be confirmed by shareholders at the annual general meeting; and that nothing would be disclosed publicly until the first two conditions were satisfied. Shapoorji Pallonji Group chairman Shapoor Mistry backed the RBI's decision and supported listing, saying the listing of Tata Sons 'can become a bridge' between shareholders and Trusts and between private heritage and public accountability. Tata group stocks fell on Friday, with Tata Chemicals down 11.5%, TCS down about 4.5%, Tata Technologies down 5.24% and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles down 3.4%; the combined market capitalisation of Tata group companies was ₹25.28 lakh crore as on 18 September against ₹25.76 lakh crore as on 15 September, an absolute change of ₹0.48 lakh crore or 1.86% since the RBI announcement. Seven listed group companies together hold around 11.94% of Tata Sons. The SP Group is seeking an extension of three to six months to repay about ₹3,500 crore due on 30 September on a zero-coupon bond issued by Portest Investment; it had raised ₹28,500 crore through non-convertible debentures in May 2025 backed by a pledge of a 9.2% stake in Tata Sons, originally priced to yield 19.75%, and raised $650 million through a Mercury Finance dollar bond in July 2026.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Upper-layer NBFC classification in 2022 → three-year listing requirement → surrender application rejected → RBI directs listing → valuation of an unlisted holding company becomes visible → board and Trusts split over control

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Scale-based regulation is the RBI's answer to 'too big to be lightly regulated' —** The Reserve Bank's scale-based regulatory framework for non-banking financial companies sorts NBFCs into base, middle, upper and top layers by size, activity and perceived risk. Entities in the upper layer face bank-like requirements — higher capital, board-level governance norms, and mandatory listing within three years of identification. The purpose is that an entity whose failure could transmit stress to the financial system should have public shareholders and public disclosure. 2. **A core investment company is a holding company that the RBI regulates —** A core investment company holds not less than 90% of its net assets in investments in group companies, with at least 60% in equity, and does not trade in those investments except for block sale or disinvestment. That is exactly what a promoter holding company does — and because it is funded partly by borrowing, the RBI regulates it as an NBFC rather than leaving it to company law alone. 3. **Articles of Association are the company's internal constitution —** The Articles, under the Companies Act, 2013, govern the internal management of the company — including how directors are appointed and what majority is required. A dispute over whether Article 118 or Article 121 applies to a chairman's reappointment is therefore not a technicality; it determines whether the board could decide the matter at all or whether shareholders must. 4. **Charitable trusts holding a commercial empire is the structure under strain —** Tata Trusts hold 65.9% of Tata Sons, which in turn controls the operating companies. The Trusts are charitable entities regulated by a State Charity Commissioner, while Tata Sons is an RBI-regulated NBFC and the operating companies are SEBI-regulated listed entities. Three regulators with different objectives sit over one chain of control, and this dispute is where those objectives meet.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Corporate governance has become a reliable GS3 area —** The syllabus carries 'effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth' alongside financial-sector regulation. A promoter holding company being forced into public markets by a regulator is a textbook illustration of the tension

	between family control and public capital. 2. **Regulatory architecture questions want the specific regulator —** The examiner rewards precision about who regulates what: RBI for the NBFC, SEBI for the listed companies, the Charity Commissioner for the trusts, and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs for the Companies Act. This story lets you name all four correctly. 3. **Ethics papers use this kind of dispute well —** A chairman reappointed by 4-1 while the largest shareholder's nominee records that conditions were breached is a clean GS4 scenario about procedural fidelity — whether an outcome reached by a valid majority is legitimate when the agreed process was not followed.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under the RBI's scale-based regulatory framework, NBFCs are classified into base, middle, upper and top layers; an upper-layer NBFC must list on a recognised stock exchange within three years of being identified as such. • A core investment company holds not less than 90% of its net assets in investments in group companies, with not less than 60% in equity shares. • The Articles of Association govern the internal management of a company under the Companies Act, 2013; the Memorandum of Association defines its objects and its relationship with the outside world. • Tata Sons was classified as an upper-layer NBFC in September 2022; the RBI's directive on listing is dated 11 September 2026. • Reported shareholding of Tata Sons: Tata Trusts 65.9%, Shapoorji Pallonji Group 18.4%, Tata Group companies 12.9%, individuals and others 2.8%.
ANALYSIS	1. **The listing requirement is about systemic risk, not about fairness to shareholders —** The scale-based framework exists because a large, leveraged holding company that is opaque can transmit stress through the system without anyone seeing it coming. Listing forces quarterly disclosure, an independent-director regime and a market price. The dispute inside the boardroom is about control; the regulator's interest is about visibility, and conflating the two — as much of the commentary does — misreads why the direction was issued. 2. **An unlisted holding company's value is a fact nobody has had to confront —** Tata Chemicals holds 2.53% of Tata Sons and the reported view is that this stake could be worth substantially more than the company's own market capitalisation. That is what happens when a holding is carried at book while the underlying is worth far more. A listing converts an argument into a price, and every party's negotiating position changes the day that price exists. This is the single most important economic consequence and it is why the SP Group, which needs to monetise, supports listing while the Trusts, which need control, resist it. 3. **The procedural objection is stronger than it looks —** Noel Tata's letter does not say the majority was wrong; it says the vote was conditional and the conditions were breached — a legal opinion on whether Article 118 or 121 applied, shareholder confirmation at the AGM, and no public disclosure until both were satisfied. If those conditions were recorded, then announcing the reappointment before they were met is a governance failure independent of who should chair the company. Boards fail far more often on process than on judgment. 4. **The market has already priced the uncertainty, modestly —** ₹0.48 lakh crore or 1.86% off the group's combined market capitalisation between 15 and 18 September, with Tata Chemicals down 11.5% and TCS down about 4.5%. The dispersion is informative: the companies that hold Tata Sons stakes moved most, which is the market saying the news is about the holding structure rather than about the operating businesses. A candidate who reads the dispersion rather than the headline fall is reading the market

	correctly. 5. **The SP Group's debt calendar explains its position entirely —** About ₹3,500 crore due on 30 September on a zero-coupon bond, ₹28,500 crore of NCDs raised in May 2025 against a pledge of 9.2% of Tata Sons at a yield originally near 19.75%, and a $650 million dollar bond in July 2026. At those yields, illiquidity is the group's central problem, and a listed Tata Sons share is the only asset that solves it. Interests here are not hidden; they are simply structural, and an answer that names them is more useful than one that moralises. 6. **Three regulators, one chain of control, no single forum —** The RBI can compel listing, SEBI governs the listed subsidiaries, the Charity Commissioner constrains what the Trusts may do with their holding, and company law governs the Articles. No one of them can resolve the whole dispute, which is why it is being fought through letters, board meetings and public statements rather than in a single proceeding. That fragmentation is the structural lesson worth carrying.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Regulatory requirements that force large unlisted holding companies into public markets improve systemic transparency but disturb settled structures of control. Critically examine."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Explain the regulatory logic before the controversy —** Scale-based regulation, upper-layer classification, the three-year listing requirement, and the core investment company definition. The reason the RBI acted must be on the page before its consequences are evaluated. 2. **Set out the transparency gains concretely —** A market price for an opaque holding, quarterly disclosure, independent directors, and the discipline that comes from minority shareholders with a right to be heard. Do not treat these as abstractions — say what each one actually reveals. 3. **Give the disruption argument its full weight —** Long-horizon philanthropic ownership is a legitimate model with real social output; a listed holding company faces quarterly pressure that a trust-owned one does not; and forced listing can transfer value to whoever most needs liquidity. Concede that the timing of a forced listing is never neutral between shareholders. 4. **Use the governance dispute as the middle term —** The reappointment fought over conditions and Articles shows that the deeper problem is not listing but the absence of clear internal rules for a structure where a charitable majority shareholder and a commercial minority shareholder must co-decide. Listing does not create that problem; it exposes it. 5. **Conclude on sequencing rather than on merits —** End by arguing that the regulator's objective — visibility of systemic risk — can be met by phased disclosure requirements ahead of listing, and that a transition designed over years produces better outcomes than one negotiated in the weeks before a deadline. That is a reform proposal, not a verdict, which is what the directive asks for.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are an officer in the financial regulation division advising on whether to grant an extension to a large group's listing deadline. Two ministers have called. How do you structure the note?** ***Approach:*** Structure it so the decision is defensible whichever way it goes. Set out the rule and the date it was triggered; the reason the rule exists; what has changed since, if anything, in the entity's risk profile; and what an extension would cost in terms of precedent — because the second application will cite the first. Put the calls in the file as recorded facts of the representations received, which is both accurate and protective.

Recommend a decision and give the reason in one sentence; a note that lists considerations without recommending is an officer avoiding responsibility, and everyone downstream can tell.

Q2. As the Charity Commissioner's officer, you are asked whether a charitable trust may vote its shares in a way that reduces the value of the trust's own holding for the sake of retaining control. What is your view?

Approach: The trustees' duty runs to the objects of the trust and to its beneficiaries, not to the trust's convenience or to any family's position, so the test is whether the decision is defensible as being in the interest of the charity. Control has a real value where it protects a reliable stream of income for charitable objects, so it is not automatically improper to prefer it; but the trustees must be able to show that they considered the trade-off and reached a reasoned conclusion, not that they never framed the question. Ask for the minutes. Where the record shows the trustees weighed value against control and decided, that is governance; where it shows the question was never asked, that is the breach.

Q3. Group employees are anxious after a 1.86% fall in combined market capitalisation and rumours about restructuring. You head HR for one of the operating companies. What do you communicate?

Approach: Tell them what is true and what you do not know, in that order, and quickly — because the alternative to your communication is not silence, it is speculation. The true part: the dispute concerns the shareholding company and the regulator's listing requirement, not the operating business, its orders or its payroll. The unknown part: what a listing will eventually mean for group structure, which nobody yet knows, including you. Then give them a date for the next update and keep it. The single most damaging thing an employer can do in a period like this is to promise that nothing will change, because if something later does, every future communication is discounted.

2.5 India's First District-Level Unemployment Map — and What It Shows About Young People Not in Work or Education

THE NEWS Unemployment rates ranged between 0.5% and 5.5% in 77.8% of districts in India, according to data released by the statistics ministry, marking the first publication of district-level estimates under the Periodic Labour Force Survey, based on the revised sampling design adopted from January 2025. The data showed that 43.1% of districts had unemployment rates between 0.5% and 3%, while 34.7% recorded rates between 3% and 5.5%. Another 14.9% of districts reported unemployment rates above 5.5%, while 7.2% recorded below 0.5%. South 24 Parganas in West Bengal and Araria in Bihar recorded the lowest unemployment rates at 0.9% each, followed by Ahmedabad in Gujarat at 1.1%. The release also highlighted concerns over the share of young people aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training. About one-fourth of districts recorded a NEET share of more than 30%; 45.9% of districts reported NEET shares between 20% and 30%, 26.1% were in the 10%-20% range and 4.2% reported below 10%. Ernakulam in Kerala recorded the lowest NEET share among youth at 9.6%, followed by Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu at 14.5% and Bengaluru Urban in Karnataka at 15%. More than half of India's districts had a labour force participation rate between 60% and 80%, while 46.1% recorded an LFPR between 40% and 60%.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Revised PLFS sampling from January 2025 → sample large enough for district estimates → first district-level map → low unemployment coexists with high NEET → the real problem is named differently

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **PLFS replaced the quinquennial Employment-Unemployment Survey** — The Periodic Labour Force Survey is conducted by the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. It was launched in 2017-18 to provide annual rural and quarterly urban estimates, replacing the old five-yearly

	Employment and Unemployment Survey. The revision of sampling design from January 2025 is what makes district-level estimation possible for the first time. 2. **Usual status and current weekly status measure different things —** PLFS reports on the usual status, which uses a reference period of the last 365 days, and the current weekly status, which uses the last seven days. Usual status captures chronic joblessness; current weekly status captures the seasonal and intermittent kind. A candidate quoting an unemployment rate without naming the status has quoted half a number. 3. **LFPR, WPR and UR are three separate ratios and the denominators differ —** The labour force participation rate is the share of the population in the labour force — working or seeking work. The worker population ratio is the share actually working. The unemployment rate is the share of the labour force, not the population, that is seeking work and not finding it. Because the unemployment rate's denominator is the labour force, it falls when people stop looking for work, which is why it can improve for a bad reason. 4. **NEET measures the young people the labour statistics miss —** 'Not in employment, education or training' counts those aged 15-29 who are neither working nor building the capacity to work. It is the indicator designed precisely to catch what the unemployment rate hides, and it is tracked internationally, including under Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Employment data has become a standing GS3 question —** The syllabus carries growth, development and employment together. The examiner has repeatedly asked about the quality of employment rather than its quantity, and about the reliability of the data itself — both of which this release speaks to directly. 2. **Statistical literacy is now examined, not assumed —** Questions have asked candidates to explain what a falling unemployment rate can conceal. A release where 77.8% of districts report unemployment under 5.5% while a quarter report NEET above 30% is the cleanest available illustration of that gap. 3. **District-level data changes the kind of answer expected —** Once estimates exist below the State level, an answer that treats employment as a national aggregate looks dated. The examiner will increasingly want spatial reasoning — why Ernakulam and Coimbatore differ from districts with the same unemployment rate.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Periodic Labour Force Survey is conducted by the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; it was launched in 2017-18. • PLFS reports estimates on the usual status, with a reference period of 365 days, and the current weekly status, with a reference period of seven days. • The unemployment rate is expressed as a percentage of persons in the labour force, not of the total population; the labour force participation rate is expressed as a percentage of the population. • 'NEET' in labour statistics denotes young persons aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education or training. • District-level PLFS estimates were made possible by a revised sampling design adopted from January 2025. • Sustainable Development Goal 8 concerns decent work and economic growth, and includes the youth NEET rate among its indicators.
ANALYSIS	1. **A very low unemployment rate in a poor district is a warning, not an achievement —**

	Araria in Bihar and South 24 Parganas in West Bengal at 0.9% report lower measured unemployment than almost anywhere else. In a low-income district with little formal employment, this is not evidence of a strong labour market; it is evidence that almost nobody can afford to be unemployed. Survival work — unpaid family labour, marginal self-employment, casual daily work — counts as employment, so the rate falls precisely where the need for a job is greatest. Any answer that treats these districts as models has misread the indicator. 2. **NEET is the honest indicator and its distribution is alarming —** About a quarter of districts report more than 30% of people aged 15-29 neither working nor studying, and only 4.2% of districts are below 10%. Because NEET counts people out of the labour force as well as in it, it catches the discouraged worker and the young woman withdrawn from both school and work — exactly the populations the unemployment rate excludes by construction. The country's youth employment problem is therefore substantially larger than the unemployment rate suggests. 3. **The low-NEET districts share a visible characteristic —** Ernakulam at 9.6%, Coimbatore at 14.5% and Bengaluru Urban at 15% are all districts with dense, diversified urban labour markets and long histories of education and skilling infrastructure. The correlation is not proof, but it points where policy should look: the districts that keep young people in work or training are those where both exist in volume and where moving between them is easy. 4. **The LFPR spread is the variable that explains the rest —** Half of India's districts are between 60% and 80% participation and 46.1% between 40% and 60%. A twenty-point gap in participation between districts with similar unemployment rates means the same headline number describes completely different labour markets. Reading the unemployment rate without the participation rate beside it is the commonest analytical error in this subject. 5. **District data changes what governance can be held to —** A national or State unemployment figure cannot be assigned to anyone. A district figure can be placed in front of a District Magistrate, a district skilling mission and a district industries centre. That is the real significance of this release — not the numbers themselves but the fact that accountability now has a unit small enough to act on. Whether that potential is realised depends on whether the data is published regularly rather than once. 6. **The methodological caveat belongs in the answer —** These are the first district estimates and they rest on a sampling design revised in January 2025. Small-area estimates carry wider confidence intervals than State ones, and a single year does not establish a trend. A candidate who uses the data confidently while noting this is demonstrating exactly the judgment the examiner is testing for.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A falling unemployment rate can conceal a worsening employment situation. Examine this proposition using recent district-level labour force data."
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Define the three ratios precisely in the introduction —** Labour force participation rate, worker population ratio and unemployment rate, with the denominator of each. The whole answer turns on the fact that the unemployment rate's denominator is the labour force, so establish it at the start. 2. **Prove the proposition with the district contrast —** Araria and South 24 Parganas at 0.9% unemployment against a quarter of districts with NEET above 30%. Explain the mechanism — survival employment is counted as employment, and discouraged workers leave the denominator — rather than simply asserting the paradox. 3. **Introduce NEET as the corrective measure —** Explain what it captures that the unemployment rate cannot, give the distribution across districts, and name Ernakulam,

	Coimbatore and Bengaluru Urban at the low end with their common characteristic of dense urban labour markets. 4. **Draw the policy implication at district level —** Argue that the appropriate response differs by district type: where NEET is high and LFPR low, the binding constraint is entry into the labour market, especially for young women; where unemployment is high and LFPR high, it is demand for labour. A single national scheme cannot address both. 5. **Close on data as an instrument of accountability —** Conclude that the significance of the release is the unit of measurement. Recommend regular publication, because a one-time district map is a study and a repeated one is a management tool — and add the caveat about confidence intervals for small areas, which shows you have read the method and not only the headline.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. Your district reports 1% unemployment and 32% NEET among those aged 15-29. The State asks you to explain the 'success'. What do you report?** ***Approach:*** Report that the two numbers together describe a problem, not a success, and explain why in one paragraph: measured unemployment is low because almost no household can support a member who is searching rather than earning, so people take whatever work exists and are counted as employed. The 32% NEET figure is the real finding, and it is the one to act on. Then propose something specific rather than a general request for schemes: a district survey of where the NEET population sits by block, sex and education level, because the young woman who left school at 15 and the graduate waiting for a government exam result need entirely different interventions and are currently in the same statistic. An officer who reports a flattering number without its companion has misinformed the government, even if every figure he sent was accurate. **Q2. You must raise female labour force participation in a district where it is under 25%. Skilling centres exist and are half empty. What is the actual constraint?** ***Approach:*** Go and find out rather than assuming, but the usual answers are distance, safety and timing, not willingness. Check whether the centre is reachable by public transport at the hours it runs, whether it runs a batch that fits around domestic work, whether there is a crèche, and whether the courses lead to jobs that exist within commuting distance — a tailoring course in a district with no garment unit produces certificates, not employment. Then fix what you can actually fix at the district level: relocate batches to the block level, run a morning batch, tie up with the two or three employers who are actually hiring, and publish placement numbers per centre so that the half-empty centre either fills or closes. Attendance follows credibility, and credibility follows placements. **Q3. A politician asks you to publicise the district's 1% unemployment rate in the run-up to a local election. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** The number is official and public, so you cannot and should not suppress it. What you can do is decline to be the one who presents it without context, and say so directly: you will supply the full data set, including participation and NEET, to anyone who asks, and you will not issue a district administration communication that quotes one indicator alone. Offer a genuine alternative — a district factsheet with all indicators, released in the normal course and available to every party equally. The line an officer has to hold here is narrow but clear: the administration provides data, it does not provide selective data, and the moment it does the next government will not believe anything it publishes.

3. Agriculture & Food

Two stories that between them cover both halves of food policy — supply and truth. On one side, an agriculture ministry planning a rabi season against a deficient monsoon and a strengthening El Niño, while stock limits and buffer onions hold a price rally in check. On the other, the food regulator taking a multinational to adjudication over what an infant formula tin and its e-commerce page claim. The first asks whether there will be enough; the second asks whether what there is can be believed.

3.1 Agriculture Ministry Advances Rabi Planning as El Niño Bites; Sugar and Onion Stock Limits Reworked

THE NEWS The agriculture ministry has stepped up preparations for the coming rabi season, working with States on crop planning, seed and fertiliser availability and water management, as a deficient monsoon and an intensifying El Niño raise concerns over soil moisture and reservoir status for winter crops, The Economic Times reported. A senior official said the ministry is preparing for the national Rabi Conference by the end of this month in consultation with States, where crop-wise production strategies for areas affected by deficient rainfall are expected to be discussed. States have been asked to assess district-wise conditions ahead of rabi sowing — residual soil moisture, and reservoir and groundwater availability — and to identify areas where farmers may need alternative crops, short-duration varieties or other interventions. Rabi planting begins from October. The paper notes that inadequate planting could affect the output of winter staples such as wheat, pulses and oilseeds and potentially feed into food inflation in the coming months; the preparations come amid renewed food-price pressure, with wholesale food inflation rising to 7.05% in August from 6.65% in July. On the price side, the same edition reports from Pune that sugar and onion, described as two daily staples whose prices had seen a large rally, have stabilised over the past week as a result of strong government measures — stock limits, a compulsion to sell allocated sugar stock within a given time window, and the sale of buffer-stock onions at ₹35 a kg. Ex-mill sugar prices, which had touched ₹65 a kg, have been contained in the ₹44-49 a kg range, while wholesale onion prices have reversed by ₹4-5 a kg. The trade is nonetheless still bullish about an increase in onion prices because the kharif crop has been delayed by about a month. Dilip Patil, regional director (west) of the Indian Federation of Green Energy, said sugar prices have stabilised from the second week of September as the combined effect of various policy measures. Separately, the Department of Food and Public Distribution on Friday relaxed the stock-holding limit for bulk consumers: the limit for bulk sugar users, who consume over 10 tonnes of sugar a month, has been raised from 15 days to 30 days, but this 30-day limit applies only to sugar imported under the Advance Authorisation Scheme or the Tariff Rate Quota. For domestically procured sugar the 15-day limit remains unchanged.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Deficient south-west monsoon and a strengthening El Niño → thin residual soil moisture and reservoir storage as the October sowing window opens → Centre pushes district-wise rabi assessment, short-duration varieties and seed-fertiliser logistics through the States → meanwhile a sugar and onion price rally forces stock limits, timed mill sales and buffer onion offloading at ₹35 a kg → prices stabilise, but wholesale food inflation at 7.05% and a month's delay in the kharif onion crop keep the risk alive

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Rabi is the irrigation-dependent season, which is why reservoirs matter more than rainfall —** Rabi crops are sown from October to December and harvested between March and June, the principal ones being wheat, barley, gram, mustard, lentil and peas. Unlike kharif, which rides the south-west monsoon directly, rabi draws on residual soil moisture, canal releases from stored water and groundwater, which is why the operative data before sowing are the Central Water Commission's weekly bulletin on live storage in major reservoirs and the Central Ground Water Board's assessment with the States. A little over half of India's net sown area is irrigated, so a rabi failure is concentrated precisely in the unirrigated remainder. This is the reason the ministry's instruction is district-wise rather than State-wise.

2. **El Niño is a Pacific phenomenon with an Indian harvest —** El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, marked by anomalous warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and a weakening of the easterly trade winds and the Walker circulation. It is historically associated with a below-normal Indian south-west

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monsoon, while its cool counterpart, La Niña, is generally associated with the opposite. The Indian Ocean Dipole, the sea-surface temperature gradient between the western and eastern tropical Indian Ocean, is the second major driver, and a positive phase can partially offset an El Niño year. Because both are probabilistic, the India Meteorological Department issues seasonal outlooks rather than forecasts, and administrators must act on likelihood.

3. Stock limits are an Essential Commodities Act power, and sugar carries its own control order — Stock-holding limits on essential commodities are imposed under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, which allows the Centre to regulate production, supply, distribution and trade. The amendment of 2020 that would have removed cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potato from routine control formed part of the three farm laws and lapsed when they were repealed in 2021, so the full power is back in use. Sugar is additionally regulated through the Sugar (Control) Order, 1966, under which the Centre allocates monthly sale quotas to mills — the legal basis for the 'compulsion to sell allocated stock in a given time window' described in the report. The administering department is Food and Public Distribution, under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution; the Price Stabilisation Fund that finances onion and pulses buffers sits with the Department of Consumer Affairs.

4. Sugarcane is priced by an instrument separate from the MSP system — Sugarcane growers are paid a Fair and Remunerative Price fixed by the Centre under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, and several States additionally declare a higher State Advised Price. CACP is an attached office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, set up in 1965 as the Agricultural Prices Commission and renamed in 1985; it recommends minimum support prices for 22 mandated crops besides the cane FRP. Mills are separately bound by a minimum selling price for sugar, introduced in 2018 to prevent distress sales below cost. The result is a commodity whose input price, output floor price and stock levels are all administered, which is why a sugar price rally becomes a policy question within days.
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<tr><td>WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)</td><td>
1. This sits on three separate lines of the GS3 syllabus at once — The syllabus carries 'major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems', 'storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints', and 'issues of buffer stocks and food security'. A single day's reporting on rabi planning, stock limits and a buffer onion release touches all three, which makes it unusually efficient revision material.

2. ENSO and cropping seasons are recurring Prelims territory — The examiner has repeatedly tested the mechanism of El Niño and the Indian Ocean Dipole, the sowing and harvesting calendar of kharif, rabi and zaid, and the statutory basis of price and stock intervention. The safe preparation is the mechanism and the parent order, never the current year's rainfall departure, which will never be asked.

3. The examinable tension is consumer protection against producer incentive — UPSC likes policies that succeed on one metric and quietly damage another. Stock limits and buffer releases visibly calm retail prices while invisibly depressing the expected price that drives next season's sowing decision. Any answer that records only the first half will read as a press release.
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<tr><td>PRELIMS NUGGETS</td><td>
• Rabi crops are sown from October to December and harvested between March and June; the principal rabi crops are wheat, barley, gram, mustard, lentil and peas.
• El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, marked by
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anomalous warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and a weakening of the easterly trade winds; it is historically associated with a below-normal Indian south-west monsoon.

- The Indian Ocean Dipole is the sea-surface temperature difference between the western and eastern tropical Indian Ocean; its positive phase is generally favourable to the Indian monsoon.
- Stock-holding limits on essential commodities are imposed under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955; sugar is additionally regulated under the Sugar (Control) Order, 1966, through which the Centre allocates monthly sale quotas to mills.
- Sugar stock limits are administered by the Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, while the Price Stabilisation Fund used for onion and pulses buffers is operated by the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- Sugarcane is paid a Fair and Remunerative Price fixed by the Centre under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966 on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices; States may additionally declare a State Advised Price.
- The Advance Authorisation Scheme permits duty-free import of inputs against an export obligation under the Foreign Trade Policy administered by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, while a Tariff Rate Quota permits a specified quantity of imports at a concessional rate of duty.

ANALYSIS

1. **A stock limit does not create supply; it borrows it from next month —** Stock limits, timed mill sales and buffer releases all work by accelerating the release of grain or sugar that already exists. That is a genuine and cheap remedy when the price rally is expectational — traders holding back in anticipation of scarcity — because forcing release breaks the expectation and the price falls without any physical addition. It is close to useless, and actively harmful, when the deficit is physical, because the same stock that calms September has been withdrawn from the lean months that follow. The honest test of the current measures is therefore not that prices stabilised within a week, but whether they hold through the pre-harvest gap.
2. **The two-tier sugar limit is trade policy wearing the clothes of food management —** Raising the bulk-user holding limit from 15 days to 30 days only for sugar imported under the Advance Authorisation Scheme or the Tariff Rate Quota, while leaving domestic sugar at 15 days, is a deliberate asymmetry. It lowers the working-capital cost of holding imported sugar and therefore pulls import volumes in without touching the duty, while protecting domestic mills' realisation. The defensible reading is narrower: Advance Authorisation sugar arrives in shiploads against an export obligation and physically cannot be consumed in fifteen days, so the relaxation is a logistics accommodation rather than a subsidy. Both readings are available on the reported facts, and an answer should say which it prefers and why.
3. **The seed chain, not the conference, decides whether contingency planning works —** Asking States in late September to identify districts needing short-duration or alternative varieties presumes that certified seed of those varieties is already in the pipeline. Breeder to foundation to certified seed is a multi-season process; no circular issued a fortnight before sowing can manufacture it. The value of the exercise therefore lies almost entirely in whether contingency seed was stocked with State agencies and ICAR centres earlier in the year. This is the difference between a plan and an announcement, and it is the question an examiner rewards a candidate for asking.
4. **Wholesale food inflation at 7.05% is a leading indicator, which is why rabi matters more than the kharif shortfall —** Wholesale prices pass into retail with a lag, so an

	August wholesale food figure of 7.05%, up from 6.65% in July, is a statement about the coming winter rather than the past summer. The crops at risk — wheat, pulses and oilseeds — are precisely the three where the domestic gap is filled by imports, most heavily in edible oil and pulses. A weak rabi therefore converts into an import bill and a current-account effect, not merely a mandi price. That chain is what distinguishes an agricultural answer from an economic one. 5. **Onion policy repeatedly defeats itself, and the buffer is the defensible half —** Selling buffer onions at ₹35 a kg is legitimate consumer protection when kharif arrivals are a month late and there is no supply-side alternative available in weeks. The instrument that damages the farmer is the export restriction that habitually accompanies such episodes, because it removes the upside in the one season when the grower earns enough to cover the seasons when he does not, and it teaches him to plant less. Collapsing the two into a single complaint about 'anti-farmer price control' is the common analytical error. The precise position is that a transparent, pre-announced buffer is good policy and an abrupt export ban is not. 6. **The federal structure makes 'working with States' the binding constraint, not a courtesy —** Agriculture is Entry 14 of the State List; the Centre's real instruments are price, trade, buffer stocks and fertiliser subsidy, all of which operate at the national level and none of which sow a field. Extension services, seed distribution, canal release schedules, electricity for tubewells and crop loans are State subjects exercised by State machinery. A national Rabi Conference is therefore a coordination device with no command authority behind it, and its output depends on whether individual States have the extension staff to translate a district-level advisory into a sowing decision. Where that machinery has been hollowed out, the advisory stops at the collectorate.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Price stabilisation measures for food commodities protect the consumer in the immediate term but can weaken the producer's incentive to plant in the following season. Examine this trade-off with reference to India's recent management of sugar and onion supplies, and discuss how pre-season rabi planning can reduce the need for such interventions. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the instruments, not the episode. One sentence establishing that stock limits flow from Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, that sugar additionally carries the Sugar (Control) Order, 1966 with its monthly release quotas, and that onion intervention runs through buffer stocks financed by the Price Stabilisation Fund. The examiner must see that you know these are three distinct legal instruments before you evaluate any of them. 2. **Body — establish that the consumer-side case is real —** Concede it without hedging, with the reported facts: ex-mill sugar contained in the ₹44-49 range after touching ₹65, wholesale onion prices reversed by ₹4-5 a kg, buffer onions sold at ₹35, all within about a week. Add that wholesale food inflation at 7.05% in August makes intervention politically and economically unavoidable. An answer that refuses to grant this loses credibility for everything after it. 3. **Body — then state the producer-side cost with equal precision —** Argue that intervention truncates the upper tail of the price distribution that the grower relies on to recover the losses of surplus seasons, and that repeated truncation shows up as reduced acreage in the following cycle, which manufactures the next shortage. Distinguish sharply between the transparent, pre-announced buffer release, which is defensible, and abrupt export restrictions, which are not. That distinction is where the marks are. 4. **Body — shift the answer to the supply side where the durable fix lies —** Make the case that contingency planning — district-wise assessment of residual soil moisture,

reservoir and groundwater availability, and the pre-positioning of short-duration and drought-tolerant certified seed — reduces the frequency with which price instruments are needed at all. Note the constraint honestly: the seed chain must be stocked seasons in advance, and agriculture being a State subject, delivery depends on State extension machinery rather than a Union conference.

5. **Conclusion —** Close on predictability rather than on doing more. A published, rule-based trigger for buffer release and stock limits — stated in advance, applied symmetrically, and withdrawn on a stated condition — would give both the trader and the farmer a price expectation to plan against, which discretionary intervention destroys. That is the reform, and it costs nothing.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the District Collector of a district the State has flagged as low in residual soil moisture ahead of rabi sowing. The contingency plan asks you to move farmers to short-duration varieties, but your agriculture office reports that certified seed of those varieties is available for barely a fifth of the affected area. What do you do?

Approach: Say so upward immediately and in writing, with the exact shortfall by variety and block, because a district that reports a plan it cannot execute causes the State to stop looking for seed. Then allocate what exists where it does the most good rather than spreading it thinly — the unirrigated blocks with no assured canal turn, not the ones that will manage on tubewells anyway. Use the remaining weeks for what does not need seed: advising on reduced seed rate with line sowing, a single life-saving irrigation schedule agreed with the canal division, and clear advice on which fields are better left for a fodder or pulse crop than sown to wheat that will fail at grain filling. Publish the block-wise allocation before distribution begins, because the fastest way to lose a scarce input is to distribute it without a visible rule.

Q2. Traders in your district's largest mandi are holding onion stock and quietly refusing to unload while the government's buffer sells at ₹35 a kg. Your officers want to launch raids under the stock limit order. What is your instruction?

Approach: Establish the fact before the enforcement. Stock limits are a legal power under the Essential Commodities Act and raids are lawful, but a raid conducted on suspicion that turns up nothing converts a market problem into a law-and-order problem and pushes the trade to unrecorded storage, which is worse for the consumer. Ask the market committee for arrival and dispatch data for the past three weeks, identify the specific holders whose declared stock exceeds the notified limit, and issue notices to them by name with a short compliance window. Simultaneously increase the visible supply through buffer outlets, because the holding behaviour is a bet on scarcity and the cheapest way to break it is to make the bet look wrong. Reserve prosecution for those who do not comply after notice, and say publicly and in advance exactly what the limit is and what will happen if it is breached.

Q3. A delegation of onion growers meets you during the buffer release and says the government intervenes only when prices rise and never when they collapse below cost. How do you answer them, knowing they are substantially right?

Approach: Do not deny the asymmetry, because they can see it and denial costs you everything else you will need to say to them that season. Acknowledge that intervention is faster and more visible on the consumer side, and that the instruments available on the producer side — procurement for the buffer itself, market intervention support, storage capacity — are slower and thinner. Then be concretely useful: tell them what you can actually move, which is procurement for the buffer at the notified price from this district, expansion of scientific storage under the horticulture schemes so that the crop is not distress-sold within days of harvest, and accurate arrival data published so nobody is trading blind. Record their representation formally and send it up with the district's own acreage and price series attached, and give them the reference. An officer who concedes a real asymmetry and then acts on the part he controls keeps his credibility; one who argues the government is even-handed loses it permanently.

3.2 FSSAI Files Three Adjudication Cases Against Nestlé India Over Infant Formula Claims and Biotin Content

THE NEWS The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India said on Friday that it has initiated legal action against Nestlé India Ltd. for alleged non-compliance with food safety norms in three infant nutrition products, PTI reported in The Hindu. The Economic Times reported that the regulator filed three separate cases for adjudication against the company in connection with NAN Excella Pro Stage 1 and Lactogen Pro 1, and a laboratory finding relating to biotin content in a follow-up formula. FSSAI said it examined the infant nutrition products and the promotional material available on e-commerce platforms and found that claims relating to “5 HMOs”, a blend of five human milk oligosaccharides, and to whey protein being easy to digest, were not appropriate. The Hindu's account specifies that in NAN Excella Pro Stage 1 the regulator flagged claims relating to “5HMOs” and “Whey Protein”, and in Lactogen Pro 1 a claim describing “Whey Protein” as easy to digest. The regulator said it sought clarifications from Nestlé India. Both products were found to be in contravention of Regulation 4(2) of the Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2020, which restricts promotional claims or material intended to increase the saleability of infant foods. Separately, a sample of a follow-up formula manufactured by the company was found to be substandard with respect to its biotin content during laboratory analysis; the sample was sent for re-analysis and the referral laboratory also found that it did not conform to the prescribed requirement of the water-soluble B vitamin under the same 2020 Regulations. The regulator also cited Section 3 of the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992, which prohibits certain advertising and promotion of infant milk substitutes and infant foods. On social media FSSAI said, “Legal action initiated against Nestlé India Ltd over several non-compliances pertaining to the FSS Act.” A Nestlé India spokesperson said the company adheres to all regulations including all rules and label declarations as per applicable laws, and that “our products are fully compliant with all applicable regulations. The said products (i.e., Nan Excella Pro and Lactogen Pro) and their labels were approved by the expert committee of FSSAI.” The company said it had again submitted a detailed response to the authorities regarding statements appearing on the label, which it described as factual in nature and supported by scientific literature.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Infant formula sells increasingly through e-commerce → marketing claims migrate from the tin's label, which an FSSAI expert committee clears in advance, to product pages and promotional material that nobody clears in advance → FSSAI examines those listings for NAN Excella Pro Stage 1 and Lactogen Pro 1 → finds the “5 HMOs” and easy-to-digest whey protein claims outside Regulation 4(2) of the 2020 infant nutrition regulations → three cases filed for adjudication, with a separate substandard-biotin finding in a follow-up formula confirmed on referral analysis

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **One statute replaced eight, and it created the regulator that is acting here —** The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 consolidated the scattered body of Indian food law, subsuming the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 along with the control orders on fruit products, meat food products, vegetable oil products, edible oils packaging, solvent-extracted oils and milk and milk products. It established the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India as a statutory body under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, consisting of a Chairperson and twenty-two members, with a Chief Executive Officer as its administrative head. FSSAI's core functions are to lay down science-based standards, regulate manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food, and accredit laboratories. Enforcement on the ground is carried out by State Food Safety Commissioners, Designated Officers at district level and Food Safety Officers, which is why the Act is a Centre-State machine rather than a purely central one.
2. **The Act separates civil adjudication from criminal prosecution, and this case is on the civil side —** Offences involving substandard or misbranded food and misleading advertisement are dealt with by penalties imposed by an adjudicating officer not

below the rank of an Additional District Magistrate, appointed by the State government. A penalty for substandard food may extend to ₹5 lakh under Section 51, and for a misleading advertisement to ₹10 lakh under Section 53. An appeal against the adjudicating officer's order lies to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal. Genuinely unsafe food, by contrast, attracts prosecution before a court with imprisonment graduated by the injury caused, which is why the phrase “cases filed for adjudication” in the reports signals the civil track and not a criminal complaint.

3. **Infant food carries a second, stricter statute administered by a different ministry —** The Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992, amended in 2003, prohibits the advertisement and promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods, bans the supply of free samples and of donations to hospitals, and requires labels to state that mother's milk is best for the baby. The 2003 amendment extended the prohibition to foods marketed for children up to two years of age. The Act is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, separately from the FSS Act's health ministry lineage, and it is among the strictest national enactments of the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981. Its logic is that in this one market the remedy is prohibition of promotion rather than regulation of promotion.
4. **The constitutional and international scaffolding behind food standards —** Article 47 of the Constitution places on the State the primary duty of raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health, and it is the stated Directive Principle behind the FSS Act's preamble. Internationally, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, established in 1963 as a joint body of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization, sets reference standards for food including compositional requirements for infant formula, and FSSAI harmonises Indian standards with Codex where it can. The WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, and the National Family Health Survey has placed the Indian figure at roughly two-thirds of infants under six months. That gap is the commercial space in which infant formula marketing operates, and the reason the law treats it differently from other food.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Regulatory bodies are a fixed Prelims target and FSSAI is the most examinable of them —** The paper regularly asks whether a body is statutory, constitutional or executive, which ministry it reports to, and what its parent Act is. FSSAI answers all three cleanly — statutory, FSS Act 2006, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare — and its penalty and adjudication architecture is exactly the kind of detail that separates a prepared candidate from a well-read one.
2. **The syllabus link runs through both GS2 and GS3 —** GS2 carries 'issues relating to development and management of social sector relating to health' and 'statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies'; GS3 carries 'food processing and related industries in India'. A case about infant nutrition standards and their enforcement sits at the intersection, and can be used in an answer on regulatory capacity as readily as one on child nutrition.
3. **The examinable tension is approval versus supervision —** The company's defence is that its labels were cleared by an FSSAI expert committee; the regulator's charge concerns promotional material on e-commerce platforms. UPSC rewards candidates who notice that both statements can be true simultaneously, because they describe different objects. That gap between ex-ante approval and continuing supervision is a general theme across Indian regulation, from drugs to financial products.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and functions under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; it consists of a Chairperson and twenty-two members, with a Chief Executive Officer as its administrative head.

- The FSS Act, 2006 consolidated earlier food laws including the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954 and the control orders relating to milk and milk products, meat food products, vegetable oil products and fruit products.
- Under the FSS Act, the penalty for substandard food may extend to ₹5 lakh under Section 51 and for a misleading advertisement to ₹10 lakh under Section 53; such penalties are imposed by an adjudicating officer not below the rank of Additional District Magistrate.
- An appeal against an order of the adjudicating officer under the FSS Act lies to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal.
- The Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2020 govern infant formula and follow-up formula; Regulation 4(2) restricts promotional claims or material intended to increase the saleability of infant foods.
- Section 3 of the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 prohibits the advertisement and promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods; the Act is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- The WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981, and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, established in 1963 as a joint FAO-WHO body, frames international food standards including those for infant formula.

ANALYSIS

1. **The company's defence and the regulator's charge are not about the same document —** Nestlé says the labels of NAN Excella Pro and Lactogen Pro were approved by an FSSAI expert committee. FSSAI says it examined the products and the promotional material available on e-commerce platforms. Both can be accurate, because label approval is an ex-ante, product-specific clearance of a fixed artefact, while a product listing is variable, unreviewed and rewritten at will. The finding worth carrying out of this story is therefore structural rather than about one firm: India's food regulation clears the tin and then has no continuing eye on the page that sells it.
2. **Infant nutrition is the one market where more information is not the remedy —** The standard regulatory answer to a doubtful claim is disclosure — require the qualifier, print the evidence, let the buyer choose. That answer fails here for three compounding reasons. The purchaser is a parent making a decision under anxiety and time pressure, the consumer of the product cannot report an effect, and a claim like “5 HMOs” carries the form of scientific precision without offering any comparative benchmark against which a layperson could evaluate it. This is precisely why the IMS Act, 1992 chose prohibition of promotion over regulation of promotion, and why a policy answer that recommends 'better labelling' here has misread the market.
3. **The biotin finding is legally the stronger case and analytically the weaker one —** A laboratory result on micronutrient content, confirmed by a referral laboratory on re-analysis, is objective, documented and difficult to contest, and it is the count most likely to survive adjudication. But a shortfall of a water-soluble vitamin in a sampled batch is a manufacturing and quality-control failure, remedied by plant audit, batch traceability and process correction. The claims issue is a market-design failure, remedied by supervision of digital marketing. Treating them as a single story about one company's conduct obscures that the two defects have entirely different fixes, and an examiner will reward the candidate who separates them.

	4. **Two statutes and two ministries govern one tin, with predictable consequences —** The FSS Act and its 2020 infant nutrition regulations run through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; the IMS Act, 1992 runs through the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Their prohibitions on promotion overlap, which is why a single enforcement action cites both. Overlapping jurisdiction generally produces either duplicated proceedings or, more often, each authority assuming the other is acting. The counter-view deserves recording: the IMS Act's severity was a deliberate legislative choice made in response to a global controversy over breast-milk substitute marketing, and folding it into a general food statute would almost certainly dilute it. The fix is coordination, not consolidation. 5. **Enforcement by announcement is a real instrument with a real due-process cost —** FSSAI publicised the action on social media while the matter is still at the stage of cases filed for adjudication. In a reputation-sensitive category this is far faster and far more powerful than any penalty the statute permits, and a regulator with limited inspection capacity would be foolish not to use it. The cost is that it collapses the distinction between an allegation and a finding, against a party that has a stated defence on record and a right of appeal to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal. An honest answer accepts the deterrent logic and still registers that publicity should ordinarily follow adjudication rather than substitute for it. 6. **The statutory penalties are too small to be the operative deterrent —** A ceiling of ₹5 lakh for substandard food and ₹10 lakh for a misleading advertisement was set in 2006 and has not been indexed; against the marketing budget of a large multinational it is a rounding error. The behaviour-changing consequences in practice are recall, retailer delisting and reputational damage — which is another way of saying that the formal legal instrument has been substituted by an informal one. By contrast the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 gives the Central Consumer Protection Authority substantially larger penalties for misleading advertisements and the power to bar endorsers, which is the more credible model. The argument for raising FSS Act penalties is not punitiveness; it is that a regulator forced to rely on publicity because its statute is toothless will keep creating the due-process problem described above.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Regulatory approval of a product's label is not the same as regulatory control of its marketing. Discuss this proposition with reference to India's legal framework for infant nutrition products, and examine whether India's food safety enforcement architecture is adequate for a market in which promotion has shifted to digital platforms. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Begin with the architecture rather than the incident. State in two sentences that infant nutrition in India is governed simultaneously by the FSS Act, 2006 with its Foods for Infant Nutrition Regulations, 2020 under the health ministry, and by the IMS Act, 1992 under the women and child development ministry, and that the second prohibits promotion outright. The reader must know there are two statutes before the argument about approval and supervision can land. 2. **Body — set out the gap precisely —** Explain that an expert committee clears a label, which is fixed and product-specific, whereas a marketplace listing and its promotional copy are variable, unreviewed and easily altered. Use the fact that Regulation 4(2) restricts promotional claims or material intended to increase saleability, and note that enforcement on digital material is necessarily reactive because nothing pre-clears it. This is the analytical core of the answer. 3. **Body — explain why this market is treated differently from other food —** Argue from information asymmetry: the buyer is a parent under pressure, the consumer is an infant who cannot report an effect, and scientific-sounding compositional claims have

	no lay benchmark. Connect this to Article 47 and to the WHO International Code of 1981, and explain that prohibition of promotion, rather than disclosure, is the deliberate regulatory choice that follows. 4. **Body — assess enforcement capacity honestly, including the counter-argument —** Note that penalties of ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh, fixed in 2006, are not a deterrent at corporate scale, that enforcement rests on State Food Safety Officers and Designated Officers with limited laboratory capacity, and that regulators therefore substitute publicity for penalty. Concede the legitimate counter-view that publicity is fast and effective, and then record the due-process cost of announcing before adjudication concludes. 5. **Conclusion —** Close with two specific, implementable proposals rather than a call for awareness: a continuing obligation on e-commerce platforms to carry only approved claim text for products in the infant nutrition category, and indexation of FSS Act penalties so that the formal instrument, rather than reputational damage, does the deterring. Both are concrete, and both follow from the argument you have made.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Designated Officer in a district and receive a complaint that a shop is displaying discount posters for infant formula. The shopkeeper says the manufacturer supplied the posters and that he has no idea any law prohibits them. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Take the posters off the wall first, because the display continues to operate while any inquiry proceeds, and a prohibition on promotion that is enforced slowly is not enforced at all. Then separate the two parties in your own mind: the retailer's ignorance is entirely plausible and a written warning with an explanation of the IMS Act is the proportionate response to him, while the manufacturer who printed and distributed the material is the party against whom the case should actually be built. Seize the material, record where it came from, and obtain a statement about the supplying distributor before anyone has time to reconsider. Then do the thing that matters more than this one shop — send a circular to the district's chemists and retailers setting out exactly what may and may not be displayed, because most of this conduct is genuine ignorance and a circular prevents a hundred cases you would otherwise have to file. **Q2. A referral laboratory confirms that a batch of a follow-up formula sold in your district is below the prescribed micronutrient requirement. The company has approached you saying the deviation is marginal and within analytical tolerance, and asks you to defer action. What is your position?** ***Approach:*** The standard is a legal requirement and not a target, and a referral analysis exists precisely to settle the question of analytical variation, so once it has confirmed the original finding the argument about tolerance has already been heard and answered. Say that plainly and proceed to the adjudicating officer. At the same time, be exact about proportionality: this is a substandard-food matter on the civil track, not unsafe food, so the remedy is penalty and corrective action rather than prosecution, and you should say so to the company as clearly as you say the first part. Ask for the batch distribution record and require withdrawal of the affected batch from the district's shelves, because a micronutrient shortfall in an infant food is not academically minor even if it is legally categorised as substandard. Document everything you were told and everything you decided, since a large company with a marginal deviation is the case most likely to be appealed. **Q3. You are the State Food Safety Commissioner. Your officers can inspect shops but have no capacity to monitor what manufacturers claim on e-commerce platforms, where most such marketing now happens. How do you address this with the resources you have?**

	Approach: Accept the constraint rather than pretending to a capability you do not have — a monitoring cell that exists on paper is worse than an acknowledged gap, because it stops anyone from solving the problem. Do the two things that scale without headcount: agree a standing arrangement with the major platforms that listings in the infant nutrition category carry only the approved label text, and publish the approved claim set so that compliance is checkable by anyone, including competitors, who are the most motivated inspectors you will ever have. Use your own limited staff for what only a public officer can do, which is sampling and laboratory testing, and route citizen complaints about listings through a simple reporting channel so that the public does the surveillance you cannot fund. Escalate to FSSAI the one thing that must be fixed centrally: a platform-level obligation, since a State-by-State approach to a national marketplace will fail.

4. International Relations

Four stories about what a country does when the map stops cooperating. A new government in Kathmandu arrives in Delhi with a $5 billion reconstruction bill and a list of old grievances; an Omani port advertises its one decisive advantage, which is that it sits outside the Strait of Hormuz; a decade of Indian oil-import data shows New Delhi's purchases tracking the American sanctions calendar almost exactly, whatever the language of strategic autonomy; and Tehran answers a naval blockade with a million volunteers while Washington clears F-35s for Saudi Arabia. Read together, they are a single argument about the difference between an interest and a capacity to act on it.

4.1 Jaishankar Meets Nepal's Finance Minister Wagle as Delhi and Kathmandu Prepare a Reset

THE NEWS Nepal's reconstruction plans after the floods and the "reset" of India-Nepal ties with the newly elected government were at the top of the agenda as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Nepal's Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle in New Delhi on Friday, as both sides prepare for a visit by Nepal Prime Minister Balen Shah to New Delhi later this year. Mr. Jaishankar said he offered his deep condolences to Mr. Wagle over the recent flash floods and, in a social media post that tagged the government's "Neighbourhood First" slogan, said the two had "discussed ways to strengthen our overall cooperation, especially in economic, energy and connectivity domains". He had met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, when India committed to continuing support for Nepal's recovery efforts. According to officials, the entire reconstruction required after the floods on August 26, which have left more than 1,400 dead and more than 6,000 missing, will top $5 billion. Nepal will appeal for multilateral support at the UN General Assembly next week in New York, where Mr. Shah is expected to make his first international speech. Mr. Wagle is in Delhi on his first visit abroad since he took office and will travel soon to Doha for a meeting of the Board of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and to the IMF and World Bank meetings in Bangkok. In a readout, the Finance Ministry said Mr. Wagle thanked India for its assistance after the floods on the Trishuli river, which overflowed in areas on both sides of the Nepal-China border and destroyed a major Chinese border crossing at Rasuwa. The two also discussed "initiatives to enhance connectivity". Nepal wants to explore road and rail links, but officials said they are keen to resolve the long-pending issue of overflight for flights to Nepali airports: India's denial of permission for bi-directional flights to the Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa near Lumbini and to Pokhara International Airport has caused Nepal major financial losses in debt repayments. Mr. Wagle's visit follows that of Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal in June, part of a call by ruling Rashtriya Swatantra Party chairman Rabi Lamichhane for a "reset" in ties troubled over the past few years on both boundary disputes and economic issues. Officials said the Shah government, in office since March this year, has been positive about engagement with New Delhi despite misgivings that led to the cancellation of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Kathmandu in May.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

August 26 floods on the Trishuli kill more than 1,400 → reconstruction bill tops $5 billion → a new Kathmandu government needs finance and market access at once → the ruling RSP calls for a reset after years of boundary and economic friction → Wagle's first foreign trip is Delhi, before the AIIB board at Doha and the Bretton Woods meetings at Bangkok

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Every reset argues about the 1950 Treaty, so know what it actually says —** The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950 is the foundational instrument of the relationship. Its operative provisions give nationals of each country national treatment in residence, property, participation in trade and commerce and movement in the territory of the other, which is the legal basis of the open border and of Nepali citizens working in India without a permit. It also contains a mutual security understanding under which each side consults the other on threats from a foreign aggressor. Nepal has demanded revision for decades on the ground that the treaty was signed by a Rana government days before its fall, and an India-Nepal Eminent Persons Group constituted to suggest revisions finalised its report in 2018, which has still not been formally received at the political level on the Indian side.
2. **A landlocked state's trade is a question of transit law, not of goodwill —** Nepal is landlocked and the overwhelming share of its third-country trade moves through

Indian territory and Indian ports under a bilateral Treaty of Transit, renewed periodically, which is separate from the Treaty of Trade. International law supplies the backdrop: Article 125 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea gives land-locked states the right of access to and from the sea and freedom of transit, but leaves the terms to be agreed bilaterally with the transit state. Nepal signed a transit and transport agreement with China in 2016 precisely to create a second option after the 2015 border blockade, which is why connectivity is never a purely commercial subject in Kathmandu.

3. **The boundary dispute has a treaty date and a map date, and candidates confuse them —** The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816, concluded between the British East India Company and Nepal after the Anglo-Nepalese War, fixed the Kali river as the western boundary. The dispute is not about the treaty but about which stream is the Kali, and therefore about the status of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. In 2020 Nepal amended its Constitution to adopt a revised political map showing these areas within Nepal, which converted an administrative disagreement into a constitutional position that any Nepali government now finds difficult to move from. India's position is that the matter is to be settled through the established bilateral mechanisms.
4. **AIIB is a multilateral development bank, not a Chinese ministry —** The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank began operations in 2016 with its headquarters in Beijing. China is its largest shareholder and India its second-largest, and India has been among its largest borrowers, which is why the frequent description of it as simply a Chinese instrument is inaccurate and unhelpful in an answer. For a finance minister assembling reconstruction money, the AIIB board, the IMF and the World Bank are stops on the same itinerary as New Delhi, and a candidate who reads the itinerary as a choice between blocs has misread it.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **The syllabus names this directly —** GS2 carries “India and its neighbourhood — relations” as a standalone head, and Nepal is the neighbour where the widest range of instruments is in play at once: a treaty of peace and friendship, a treaty of transit, a river treaty, an open border and a power-trade arrangement. Questions on the neighbourhood reward the candidate who names instruments rather than sentiments.
2. **Examiners prefer the structural irritant to the news event —** A visit is not examinable; the overflight question, the transit dependence, the 1950 Treaty revision demand and the Kalapani boundary are, because they recur. Anchor any Nepal answer on those four and the news becomes an illustration rather than the substance.
3. **Disaster response as a diplomatic instrument is a live theme —** Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief has become a recognised element of India's neighbourhood policy and of its claim to be a first responder in the region. The August 26 floods, and the earlier precedent of the 2015 earthquake response, allow a candidate to discuss whether relief converts into durable influence, which is precisely the kind of evaluative question GS2 asks.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950 and provides for national treatment for the nationals of each country in the territory of the other in matters of residence, property, trade and movement.
- The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816, concluded after the Anglo-Nepalese War, fixed the Kali river as the western boundary of Nepal; the Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura dispute concerns the identification of the source of that river.
- The Mahakali Treaty of 1996 governs the integrated development of the Mahakali river, including the Sarada Barrage, the Tanakpur Barrage and the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project.

	● Article 125 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea recognises the right of access of land-locked states to and from the sea and freedom of transit, on terms to be agreed with transit states. ● The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank commenced operations in 2016 and is headquartered in Beijing; China is the largest shareholder and India the second-largest. ● Nepal promulgated its present Constitution in 2015, establishing a federal democratic republic with seven provinces and a bicameral federal parliament comprising the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. ● Nepal is a member of SAARC, whose secretariat is at Kathmandu, and of BIMSTEC, whose secretariat is at Dhaka, as well as of the BBIN sub-regional grouping with Bangladesh, Bhutan and India.
ANALYSIS	1. **This reset is being driven by a balance sheet, not by sentiment —** A reconstruction requirement above $5 billion in an economy of Nepal's size cannot be met from domestic revenue, and Mr. Wagle's itinerary states the strategy plainly: New Delhi first, then the AIIB board at Doha, then the IMF and the World Bank at Bangkok, then an appeal at the General Assembly. India is one stop among several, and its comparative advantage is not the size of its purse but proximity, speed of delivery and the fact that relief material can move overland the same week. An Indian policy that competes on headline numbers will lose; one that competes on disbursement speed will not. 2. **Overflight is the single best test of whether the reset is real —** Nepal built two international airports, at Bhairahawa and Pokhara, and cannot service the debt on them because India has not permitted bi-directional flights using the nearer air entry routes. India has technical and security considerations for controlling entry points into its airspace, and those considerations are not manufactured. But the cost of the impasse falls entirely on Nepal's exchequer, which means that in Kathmandu the issue is read as leverage whether or not it is intended as leverage. If the Shah visit produces movement on nothing else, movement here would be worth more than a dozen memoranda, precisely because it costs India something. 3. **The flood did to Chinese connectivity what Indian policy could not —** The Trishuli overflowed on both sides of the Nepal-China border and destroyed the crossing at Rasuwa, one of the principal overland links between Nepal and Tibet. That is a temporary, physical, wholly accidental restoration of Indian transit primacy. It is worth saying openly that such an advantage decays: Beijing rebuilds infrastructure quickly, and an India that treats a washed-out road as strategic breathing space rather than as a deadline will find the space gone in two seasons. 4. **Naming the irritants is progress, but neither of them has a solution on the table —** The reported causes of the trouble of recent years are boundary disputes and economic issues. The boundary question is now embedded in Nepal's Constitution through the 2020 map amendment, which raises the political cost of any Nepali climbdown to a level no coalition can pay; the economic questions run through transit, trade deficits and the air-route problem. A reset that improves atmosphere without touching either is a reset that will need to be performed again after the next election. 5. **A new party changes the interlocutor, not the incentives —** The Rashtriya Swatantra Party came to office as an anti-establishment force, and the cancelled Foreign Secretary-level visit in May showed how quickly an early misstep can stall engagement. Nepali domestic politics has long rewarded visible distance from New Delhi, and the surest way for India to damage the present opening is to advertise it as a win. The correct posture is deliberately unglamorous: deliver the reconstruction support, settle the air routes, and let Kathmandu claim the credit.

	6. **Relief buys goodwill that expires; instruments do not —** India's recurring difficulty in the neighbourhood is not generosity in a crisis, which it has repeatedly shown, but conversion of that generosity into structure. Flood assistance in September is forgotten by the following monsoon unless it is embedded in something with a life of its own, such as a revised transit treaty, an operational power-trade framework or a settled aviation arrangement. The question to ask of the Shah visit later this year is not how much was announced but how much of it will still exist in 2031.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Every Indian attempt to reset relations with Nepal begins with assistance and ends at the same unresolved questions of boundary, transit and treaty revision.” Critically examine this statement in the light of recent developments in India-Nepal relations. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the structure of the relationship rather than the visit: an open border, a 1950 Treaty granting national treatment, a transit dependence for a landlocked state, and a boundary question now written into Nepal's Constitution. One sentence locating the Jaishankar-Wagle meeting and the forthcoming visit of Prime Minister Balen Shah as the current instance of a recurring cycle. 2. **Body — establish the pattern with evidence —** Show the cycle concretely: assistance after a disaster, a warm visit, agreement to “enhance connectivity”, and then the same list of unsettled items. Use the August 26 floods, the reconstruction requirement above $5 billion, and the fact that the overflight question at Bhairahawa and Pokhara has remained open long enough to cause debt-servicing losses. 3. **Body — concede what has genuinely changed —** Do not overstate the pessimism. The 2016 Nepal-China transit agreement, the AIIB, and Nepal's direct appeal to multilateral lenders mean Kathmandu now has alternatives it did not have in 1990 or 2015. That changes India's bargaining position and is an argument for settling the small irritants quickly rather than holding them. 4. **Body — separate what India can settle from what it cannot —** The boundary question involves a constitutional amendment on the Nepali side and is not amenable to a quick fix; the transit, trade and air-route questions are administrative and are within India's gift. An answer that distinguishes the two, and argues that progress on the second builds the trust needed for the first, is making a policy argument rather than listing grievances. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the test of Neighbourhood First is not the speed of relief but the durability of the instruments left behind, and that converting episodic goodwill into a revised transit arrangement, a functioning power-trade framework and a settled aviation regime is the only way to break the cycle the question describes.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Joint Secretary handling Nepal. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and the security agencies oppose bi-directional flights to Bhairahawa and Pokhara. Nepal has raised it again. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Do not treat it as a binary. Ask the agencies to state, on paper, the specific operational objection to each proposed entry route rather than a general security position, because a written objection can be examined and a general one cannot. Then look for the partial move: a limited number of daily slots, a defined corridor, a trial period with joint review, or a seasonal arrangement — any of which tests the objection in practice at low cost. Carry the political point upward honestly, which is that an issue costing Nepal money every month while costing India nothing is read in Kathmandu as deliberate, and that the reputational cost of the impasse now exceeds whatever is being protected. If the agencies still object after a written examination, say so to the Nepali side clearly rather than letting the file age; an explained refusal damages a

relationship far less than an unexplained silence.

Q2. You are the District Magistrate of a border district during the flood relief operation. Nepali officials ask you to allow relief trucks through without the usual documentation, and your customs and security staff object.

Approach: Distinguish the emergency from the precedent. Use the existing legal route rather than inventing one: request an immediate general exemption or simplified procedure for identified relief consignments through the competent authority, so that what you do is documented and repeatable rather than a personal favour that your successor cannot grant. In the meantime, keep the material moving with a manifest-based clearance and a physical check at a single designated point, which addresses the security concern without stopping the convoy. Put a senior officer at the crossing personally, because the disputes at such moments are minor and resolvable on the spot and become intractable only when referred upward. Record everything; relief operations generate audit questions years later and the officer who kept a clean log is the one who is protected.

Q3. An interview board asks you: is the open border with Nepal an asset or a liability?

Approach: Answer that it is both, and that the honest position is to say which costs you are willing to bear for which benefits. The benefits are real and large — kinship ties, labour mobility, the everyday economy of the border districts, and a level of people-to-people contact that no visa regime could reproduce. The costs are equally real: the border is used for smuggling, for currency movement and, on occasion, for the transit of persons of security interest. The policy conclusion is not to close it, which would be both impractical and politically damaging, but to invest in the intelligence and enforcement capacity that manages an open border rather than pretending it is a controlled one. A candidate who says only that it is a symbol of friendship has not answered the question.

4.2 Oman Pitches Sohar Port, Sited Outside the Strait of Hormuz, as India's Gateway to the Gulf

THE NEWS Oman's Sohar Port is actively positioning itself as a gateway for Indian businesses, traders and investors to access the Gulf and the broader West Asia region amid the maritime challenges posed by the US-Iran war, The Economic Times reported. Authorities of Sohar Port and the Sohar Free Zone, which are situated outside the Strait of Hormuz, held an exposition in New Delhi earlier this week to attract Indian businesses, highlighting the integrated port ecosystem and investment opportunities across industrial sectors. The port and free zone have attracted more than $30 billion in total investments and handle over 72 million tonnes of cargo annually. Oman's ambassador to India, Issa Saleh Abdullah Alshibani, told the paper that “Sohar and other ports of Oman are now becoming a gateway for Indian manufacturing sector expansion in Oman and also the wider region”. People familiar with the matter said Sohar's proximity to the UAE, and a plan for a green corridor with the UAE's Jebel Ali Port allowing quicker customs clearance for Indian goods, is an added advantage. Operational since 2004, Sohar is a 21 million square metre deep-sea hub built around clusters in logistics, petrochemicals and metals, to which a food cluster containing Oman's first dedicated agricultural products terminal has recently been added. The Port of Salalah, which hosts more than 2,500 vessel calls a year, is also being positioned for Indian agricultural and food exports, and India has a strategic presence at the Port of Duqm, described as the gateway to the largest special economic zone in the Gulf. The oil trade is confirming the logic: multiple trade sources told the paper that Saudi Arabia has sold about 60 million barrels of crude from Ras Tanura, inside the Strait, for loading via ship-to-ship transfer at Sohar this month and next, with Aramco's exports from inside the Gulf rebounding to an average of 1 million to 1.5 million barrels a day, partly replacing volume lost at the Red Sea port of Yanbu after the East-West pipeline was attacked. Engineers India Ltd chairman Atul Gupta said separately that Saudi Arabia and the UAE plan to expand pipeline and storage infrastructure to reduce dependence on the Strait, and that the conflict has opened up opportunities in the region. On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a telephone call from UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in which the two exchanged views on developments in West Asia and discussed deepening the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in energy, defence, technology, investment and health.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

War brings the Strait of Hormuz close to closure → Gulf exporters and Indian traders need routes that avoid it → Oman's ports at Sohar, Salalah and Duqm lie outside the Strait → Sohar markets itself in New Delhi and plans a customs green corridor to Jebel Ali → Aramco begins moving barrels out of the Gulf by ship-to-ship transfer at Sohar

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The geography of the chokepoint is the whole story —** The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and thence the Arabian Sea, with Iran on the northern shore and Oman's Musandam exclave on the southern. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint, because the crude and liquefied natural gas of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and much of the UAE must pass through it to reach any market. The only genuine bypasses are overland: the Saudi East-West pipeline carrying crude to Yanbu on the Red Sea, and the UAE's pipeline from Habshan to Fujairah on the Gulf of Oman. Oman's own ports at Sohar, Salalah and Duqm face outward and never require a ship to enter the Gulf at all. 2. **International law treats straits differently from ordinary territorial sea —** Part III of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea creates the regime of transit passage for straits used for international navigation, under which ships and aircraft enjoy continuous and expeditious passage that the coastal state may not suspend, a stronger right than the innocent passage applicable in the ordinary territorial sea. Article 26 further provides that no charge may be levied upon foreign ships by reason only of their passage. Iran signed but has not ratified the Convention and has asserted that the transit passage regime binds only parties, while the United States is not a party either and claims the regime as customary law. That unresolved argument is the legal backdrop to every incident in the Strait. 3. **India and Oman have the oldest and quietest of India's Gulf relationships —** Oman is the Gulf state with which India has the longest continuous treaty relationship and the deepest defence engagement. It is the only country in the region with which India conducts bilateral exercises with all three services — Naseem Al Bahr with the navy, Al Nagah with the army and Eastern Bridge with the air force — and India has berthing and logistics access at the Port of Duqm, which is valuable precisely because Duqm sits on the Arabian Sea outside the Strait. A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement has been concluded between the two countries. Oman's traditional posture of neutrality, including its role as an intermediary between Washington and Tehran, is what makes it usable by everyone at once. 4. **This fits into an existing Indian connectivity architecture, not beside it —** India's westward connectivity rests on several overlapping projects: Chabahar in Iran on the Gulf of Oman, developed for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia; the International North-South Transport Corridor running through Iran to Russia; and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor announced in 2023, which routes through the Gulf, Israel and the Mediterranean. Each of them assumes that West Asia is passable. The value of an Omani port to India is that it is the one node in this architecture that does not depend on either the Strait of Hormuz or the political condition of Iran.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Chokepoints are a standing Prelims and GS1 favourite —** The examiner has repeatedly tested the location of straits, canals and the seas they connect, and the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab-el-Mandeb, the Malacca Strait and the Suez Canal are the recurring set. The correct preparation is not memorising traffic figures, which change, but knowing which water bodies each connects and which states front them. 2. **The syllabus head is broader than it looks —** GS2 carries “bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests”, and GS3 carries infrastructure including ports. A port in a third country that changes India's exposure to a maritime risk sits in both, and an answer that connects the geography to

	the trade policy is answering at the right level. 3. **Supply-chain resilience has replaced supply-chain efficiency as the frame —** Questions that once asked about lowering logistics costs now ask about de-risking routes. The distinction to carry into an answer is that diversification of source and diversification of route are different insurance policies against different failures, and India has historically bought more of the first than the second.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea; Iran lies on its northern shore and Oman's Musandam exclave on its southern shore. • Part III of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides for transit passage through straits used for international navigation, which the coastal state may not suspend; Article 26 bars charges on foreign ships by reason only of their passage. • Sohar, Salalah and Duqm are Omani ports located outside the Strait of Hormuz; India has strategic access to the Port of Duqm. • Ras Tanura is Saudi Arabia's principal crude export terminal inside the Gulf and Yanbu its terminal on the Red Sea, the two being linked by the East-West pipeline across the Arabian peninsula. • Jebel Ali, near Dubai, is the largest port in the UAE. • Oman is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose secretariat is at Riyadh, along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. • India conducts the Naseem Al Bahr naval exercise, the Al Nagah army exercise and the Eastern Bridge air exercise with Oman, the only country in the region with which it exercises with all three services.
ANALYSIS	1. **Oman is monetising a geographical accident, and doing it well —** Sohar's pitch to Indian business contains nothing new about the port itself. Its clusters, its free zone and its cargo throughput existed before February. What has changed is the value of one fixed attribute, which is that a ship calling at Sohar never enters the Gulf. This is worth noticing as a general point about geopolitics: a state's most valuable asset is often something it did not build and cannot lose, and Oman's long-standing neutrality is what allows it to sell that asset to Indian traders, Saudi exporters and Western navies simultaneously without any of them objecting. 2. **Ship-to-ship transfer at Sohar is a workaround, not a bypass, and the distinction matters —** The 60 million barrels Aramco has sold still leave Ras Tanura, which is inside the Strait, and are transferred to other vessels at Sohar. The cargo therefore still transits Hormuz; what changes is who bears the risk and for how long, and the buyer is spared sending his own vessel into the war zone. That is a real commercial service but it does not remove the chokepoint from the chain. The only measures that actually remove it are the pipeline and storage expansions that Saudi Arabia and the UAE are now planning, which is exactly why an Indian engineering firm sees an order book where a shipping analyst sees a detour. 3. **For India the binding constraint has shifted from source to route —** Indian policy has spent a decade diversifying the countries it buys crude from. The present crisis exposes the limit of that strategy: a barrel bought from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar or the UAE goes through the same water regardless of whose flag is on the loading terminal. Source diversification protects against a sanctions decision or a supplier's politics; route diversification protects against a strait. India has bought a great deal of the first and relatively little of the second, and the second is what is being tested now.

	4. **A green corridor is a customs arrangement wearing an infrastructure costume —** The proposed Sohar-Jebel Ali green corridor promises faster clearance for Indian goods, which is valuable. But its value rests entirely on two customs administrations in two different states operating a shared risk-management and documentation regime consistently, day after day, for cargo that neither of them originates. Such arrangements are announced far more often than they are delivered, and the honest evaluation is that this one should be judged in eighteen months by dwell times, not now by press releases. 5. **The counter-argument deserves a hearing: war-premium infrastructure has a poor record —** Ports that acquire strategic importance because a route is disrupted frequently lose it when the disruption ends, and the region offers its own cautionary examples in the uneven utilisation of both Chabahar and Duqm relative to the expectations announced at their inception. If the Strait reopens fully, an Indian exporter who has restructured his logistics around Sohar will face higher costs than a competitor who waited. A sober Indian position is to treat the Omani route as insurance that is worth its premium rather than as a permanent reordering of Gulf trade. 6. **The Modi-MBZ call shows the hedge being placed at the level of the relationship, not the route —** A conversation covering energy, defence, technology, investment and health is not about the present crisis; it is about ensuring that the crisis does not become the only content of the relationship. That is the useful observation for an answer on India's Gulf policy: India's exposure in West Asia is simultaneously energy, remittances, a very large resident population and now maritime routes, and a policy that engages only on the item currently in the news will be caught out when the next item moves.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's energy security strategy has emphasised diversification of suppliers while leaving its dependence on a single maritime chokepoint largely unaddressed." Discuss with reference to the Strait of Hormuz and evaluate the options available to India. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Begin with the geography stated precisely: the Strait connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and the exports of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and most of the UAE must pass through it. One line establishing that India imports the overwhelming majority of its crude and that a large share of it originates inside the Gulf. 2. **Body — distinguish the two kinds of diversification —** Set out clearly that buying from more countries and shipping by more routes are different forms of insurance. Show that most of India's effort, including its purchases from Russia, West Africa and the Americas, has been of the first kind, and that the Gulf share still travels through one strait. 3. **Body — evaluate the available route options honestly —** Cover the genuine bypasses: the Saudi East-West pipeline to Yanbu, the UAE's Habshan-Fujairah pipeline, and Omani ports outside the Strait such as Sohar, Salalah and Duqm. Note that ship-to-ship transfer at an Omani port shifts risk but does not avoid the Strait, and that the expansion of pipeline and storage capacity now being planned by Saudi Arabia and the UAE is the only structural answer. 4. **Body — state what India itself controls —** Strategic petroleum reserves and their expansion, long-term contracts with suppliers outside the Gulf, equity oil abroad, refinery configuration flexibility that permits switching crude grades, and the demand-side measures of electrification and biofuels. Add the naval dimension, since freedom of navigation in the Arabian Sea is a task the Indian Navy already performs.

	5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that chokepoint risk cannot be eliminated by any importer and must instead be priced, insured and hedged, and that India's realistic objective is to shorten the period for which a disruption is unmanageable rather than to pretend it can be made impossible.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas during a partial closure of the Strait. The refiners want the strategic reserves released immediately; the Finance Ministry wants them held. What do you advise?** ***Approach:*** Advise a calibrated release tied to a stated trigger rather than a decision taken under pressure in either direction. Strategic reserves exist to buy time for physical supply to be rearranged, not to manage price, and releasing them to soften a price spike exhausts the one instrument that works against a genuine physical shortage. Set out to the Cabinet the criterion you will use — days of cover at current arrival rates, not the headline price — and publish that criterion, because a reserve whose release rule is unknown invites speculation about when it will happen. At the same time move on the things that actually create supply: freight and insurance support for vessels willing to sail, expedited clearance for alternative grades, and early conversation with suppliers outside the Gulf. The reserve is the last instrument, not the first. **Q2. You are a Joint Secretary asked to decide whether India should invest public money in an Omani port facility that is valuable mainly because of the present war.** ***Approach:*** Insist that the investment be justified on peacetime economics with the strategic value treated as an option premium, not the other way round. Ask what the facility earns if the Strait reopens fully next year, because that is the likelier scenario over the life of the asset, and be explicit that a project which only pays in a crisis is an insurance product and should be sized like one. Prefer structures that are reversible and small — capacity rights, a long-term lease, a joint venture with an Indian operator — over sovereign construction commitments, since the history of Indian port commitments abroad is that construction is easier to begin than utilisation is to generate. And record the assumptions, so that the officer reviewing this in 2035 knows what was believed in 2026 and can judge the decision on what was known at the time. **Q3. Indian exporters ask you, as a commerce official, whether to reroute their Gulf-bound cargo through an Omani port at higher cost. What do you tell them?** ***Approach:*** Tell them the truth, which is that you cannot forecast the war and should not pretend to. Give them what a government can give that a trader cannot obtain himself: the current position on war-risk insurance and the routes underwriters will cover, the status of customs arrangements at the alternative port, and a single point of contact who will answer questions in hours rather than weeks. Suggest splitting consignments across routes rather than moving everything, because that is what a firm does when the probability distribution is genuinely unknown, and it is also what keeps the alternative route commercially alive if it is later needed at scale. Do not issue an advisory that reads as a direction; if the war ends next month the exporters who followed it will have borne a cost on the government's advice, and that is a liability no official should create.

4.3 Indian Crude Buying Fell With Every US Sanction and Returned the Moment Each Eased

THE NEWS Over the past decade India has complied with U.S. pressure to reduce oil imports from countries Washington has sought to isolate — Venezuela, Iran and Russia — even though they were important sources, and official data show that once the pressure eased India immediately turned back to them, The Hindu reported. The report comes against the backdrop of a U.S. Bill that proposes tariffs of up to 100% on India for importing Russian oil. The Ministry of External Affairs issued a strong statement on Thursday asserting India's strategic independence in sourcing energy, and its spokesperson said on Friday that "energy sourcing is based on national interest" and that India continues "to buy energy from diversified sources", adding that "we have already conveyed, at senior levels of the U.S. administration, the implications that the legislation could have on India's energy security, for the international energy markets, and the overall bilateral partnership". Earlier the Ministry had said the Indian side "made clear its determination to take all measures to protect its trade and economic interests". The data tell a consistent story. Venezuela's share of India's oil imports stood at 6.7% in 2017-18 and 6.4% in 2018-19; after President Donald Trump widened sanctions in January 2019 to include Venezuela's oil sector, the share fell to 5.9% in 2019-20, crashed to 1.1% in 2020-21 and to zero by 2021-22, where it remained in 2022-23. Imports resumed in small quantities under the Biden administration but stayed below 1%, and after Mr. Trump partially lifted sanctions on Venezuelan oil companies in March 2026 following a leadership change he orchestrated in that country, the Venezuelan share swung back up to 4.8% between April and July 2026. Iran's share fell to 1% after Mr. Trump reimposed wide-ranging sanctions in November 2018 and to zero by 2020-21, and India imported no oil from Iran for the six years spanning 2020-26; after Mr. Trump allowed Iran to sell limited quantities in March 2026, Iran's share rose to 1.1% over April-July 2026. Russia's share rose to hover between 30% and 40% from July 2024 to July 2025, but after Mr. Trump raised tariffs on India from 25% to 50% in August 2025 as a penalty for buying Russian oil, it fell to 19.3% by February 2026. In February 2026 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the tariff regime, removing the penal tariffs, and Russia's share climbed to more than 51% by July 2026 — a rise that coincided with the U.S. attack on Iran, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and a sharp rise in global oil prices.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Washington widens sanctions on Iran in November 2018 and Venezuela in January 2019 → their shares of Indian crude fall to zero → a 50% tariff in August 2025 penalises Russian purchases → Russia's share halves to 19.3% by February 2026 → the U.S. Supreme Court strikes the tariff regime → Russia's share reaches more than 51% by July 2026

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Import dependence is the fact every other fact hangs from —** India imports the overwhelming majority of the crude oil it consumes, well above 80% of requirement, and is among the largest importers in the world. This single structural feature explains why energy is treated as a first-order foreign policy question rather than a commercial one, why the current account deficit is sensitive to crude prices, and why a sanctions regime aimed at a producer lands on India as a domestic economic problem. Domestic production has been broadly flat for years despite successive licensing reforms, including the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy and the Open Acreage Licensing Programme.

2. **The instrument is secondary sanctions, and they do not operate on states —** United States sanctions of this kind work extraterritorially through the financial system: they threaten banks, insurers, shipowners and traders in third countries with loss of access to the dollar clearing system and to U.S. markets if they deal with a designated entity. The Office of Foreign Assets Control administers them. The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017 is the best known such statute in the Indian context. The practical consequence is that a refiner can be pushed to stop buying without any Indian government decision at all, because his letter of credit, his insurer and his tanker owner all withdraw before any minister is consulted — a point that is essential to judging what "compliance" means here.

3. **India's cushion against a supply shock is smaller than it appears —** The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited, a special purpose vehicle under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, maintains underground rock caverns at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur with a combined capacity of about 5.33 million tonnes, with a second phase approved at Chandikhol and Padur. India is an Association country of the International Energy Agency rather than a full member, and the IEA obligation on members to hold 90 days of net imports therefore does not bind it. Reserves held by refiners are additional but are working stocks, not a strategic buffer.

4. **Strategic autonomy is a doctrine with a constitutional and legislative frame —** The conduct of foreign affairs and trade with foreign countries falls to the Union under

	Entries 10, 13, 14 and 41 of the Union List, and Article 253 empowers Parliament to legislate for implementing international agreements. Article 51, a Directive Principle, directs the State to promote international peace and security and to foster respect for international law. The doctrinal lineage runs from non-alignment through to what is now described as multi-alignment, and its operative claim is that India reserves the right to make issue-by-issue choices rather than to align its positions wholesale with any bloc.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Energy security is written into the syllabus twice over —** GS2 carries "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests" and GS3 carries infrastructure including energy. A story about sanctions altering India's crude basket sits precisely on the seam, and the best answers move between the two rather than choosing one. 2. **The examiner asks about autonomy, and expects evidence rather than assertion —** Questions on strategic autonomy are regularly set, and weak answers restate the doctrine. A candidate who can put a behavioural test to it — did the policy change when the cost of maintaining it rose — is doing what the verb "critically examine" actually asks. 3. **Sanctions as an instrument of statecraft is an emerging theme —** Secondary sanctions, the weaponisation of financial infrastructure, and responses such as local-currency settlement and alternative messaging systems are increasingly examinable. Understanding that these instruments bite on private intermediaries rather than on governments is the analytical key to the whole subject.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited maintains underground crude storage at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur with a combined capacity of about 5.33 million tonnes; a second phase has been approved at Chandikhol and Padur. ● India is an Association country of the International Energy Agency, which is headquartered in Paris, and not a full member; the IEA's 90-day emergency stockholding obligation applies to members. ● The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is headquartered in Vienna; Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Venezuela were among its founding members, while Russia is not a member and participates through the wider OPEC+ arrangement. ● The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act was enacted by the United States in 2017 and provides for secondary sanctions on third-country entities. ● Sanctions administered by the United States are implemented by the Office of Foreign Assets Control in the Department of the Treasury. ● Trade and commerce with foreign countries and entering into treaties fall within the Union List; Article 253 empowers Parliament to make laws for implementing international agreements. ● Article 51 of the Constitution, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to promote international peace and security and to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.
ANALYSIS	1. **The pattern is real, but the word "complied" needs to be interrogated before it is used —** The correlation in the data is not in doubt: three suppliers, three sanction events, three collapses to near zero, and in each case a return when the restriction lifted. What the data cannot show is the mechanism. Indian refiners are corporate

	entities whose banks, insurers and shipowners face secondary sanctions directly, and a purchase can become impossible to finance long before any government decides anything. A rigorous answer separates state compliance from commercial withdrawal, and notes that a sanctions regime designed well enough does not need the target government's cooperation at all. 2. **The speed of the return is the sharpest evidence in the story —** Russia's share fell to 19.3% by February 2026 and exceeded 51% by July 2026, a move of more than thirty percentage points within five months of the U.S. Supreme Court striking down the tariff regime. That velocity tells you the preference never changed; only the price of acting on it did. It also establishes that the reduction was not a durable diversification of the basket but a suspension, which matters, because a government defending its record on diversification should be asked whether it built any capacity that survived the episode. 3. **The three cases are not symmetric and treating them as one pattern loses the argument —** Venezuela and Iran together accounted for a modest share of Indian imports, and their exclusion, while costly in refinery economics and freight, was absorbable. Russia at 30-40%, bought at a discount, was a different order of dependence, and India resisted longer and conceded less. The honest conclusion is not that India always yields but that it yields in proportion to how cheaply it can, which is an unremarkable description of how most states behave and a far more defensible thesis than either the official or the critical version. 4. **A foreign court, not a negotiation, restored India's options —** The penal tariffs ended because the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the tariff regime, not because a bilateral understanding was reached or because Indian pressure worked. For a country asserting strategic independence in energy sourcing, that is an uncomfortable fact worth stating plainly: the constraint was lifted by American constitutional litigation. It also implies the relief is contingent, since a differently drafted statute — such as the Bill now proposing tariffs of up to 100% — could reimpose the same pressure through a route the courts have not closed. 5. **A 51% share is a vulnerability dressed as a victory —** Diversification was the stated objective, and the outcome of the episode is that a single supplier now accounts for more than half of India's crude imports, a higher concentration than before the pressure began. Any rating agency or official document that cites diversified sourcing as a buffer has to be read against that number. Concentration risk with a supplier under sanction from India's largest export market is a specific and nameable exposure, not a general one, and it is the strongest argument available to those who think the return to Russian crude has been pursued past the point of prudence. 6. **The Ministry's formulation is a deterrent argument, and it is carefully built —** The spokesperson did not assert a right; he described consequences, in three parts — implications for India's energy security, for international energy markets, and for the overall bilateral partnership. The middle term is the one aimed at Washington, since an Indian withdrawal from Russian crude tightens a market already disrupted by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and raises the price Americans pay. That is the argument with actual force behind it, and a candidate who notices that the strongest Indian card is market arithmetic rather than sovereignty rhetoric has read the statement correctly.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India describes its crude oil sourcing as an exercise of strategic autonomy, yet the composition of its imports over the last decade has closely tracked the United States sanctions calendar." Critically examine, and discuss what would be required to make energy sourcing genuinely autonomous. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the structural position rather than the controversy: India imports well over 80% of its crude, which makes sourcing a strategic question. State the claim under examination in one line, namely that sourcing is determined by national interest, and indicate that the answer will test that claim against the record. 2. **Body — set out the evidence with dates and shares —** Use the sequence precisely: Venezuela from 6.7% in 2017-18 to zero by 2021-22 after the January 2019 widening of sanctions; Iran to zero by 2020-21 after November 2018 and no imports for six years; Russia from 30-40% down to 19.3% by February 2026 after the August 2025 tariff increase, then above 51% by July 2026 after the tariffs were struck down. Dates and numbers are what separate this answer from a general essay. 3. **Body — supply the counter-argument fairly —** Explain that secondary sanctions operate on banks, insurers and shipowners, so a refiner's withdrawal is not the same as a government's submission. Note also that India resisted longest where the stake was largest, and that no state with this level of import dependence exercises unconstrained choice. 4. **Body — say what autonomy would actually require —** Be concrete: larger and faster-fillable strategic reserves, payment and settlement arrangements outside the dollar system, insurance and shipping capacity under Indian control, refinery configurations that can switch grades, long-term contracts with producers outside any sanctions perimeter, and a demand path that reduces the volume at risk. Autonomy is an infrastructure question before it is a diplomatic one. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the present position is better described as constrained bargaining than as either submission or independence, and that the test of policy is not what is asserted when pressure is applied but what capacity remains after it is withdrawn.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. A public sector refiner asks whether it may continue to buy from a supplier that a foreign legislature has proposed to penalise. The Bill has not been passed. What do you say?** ***Approach:*** Do not give an oral assurance and do not give an instruction you would not put in writing, because the refiner's board will need to record the basis of whatever it does and an informal comfort from an official is worthless to it in an audit or a shareholder dispute. Say what is legally true: no Indian law prohibits the purchase, a foreign Bill that has not been enacted creates no obligation, and the commercial risk of financing, insurance and vessel availability is the company's to assess. Then be useful — convene the refiners, the banks and the insurers together so that each learns what the others will actually do, since half the paralysis in such situations comes from each participant assuming the others have already withdrawn. Escalate to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Finance Ministry the specific exposures you find, because those are the facts that make a diplomatic representation concrete. **Q2. The Cabinet Secretariat asks you to prepare a contingency note for a scenario in which a major supplier becomes unavailable within thirty days. What does the note contain?** ***Approach:*** Three things, in order. First, the arithmetic: days of cover from strategic reserves plus refiner working stocks at current run rates, stated as a range with the assumptions visible, because a single number in a contingency note will be quoted back without its caveats. Second, the substitution map: which alternative grades each refinery can process without modification, which require blending, and what the freight and quality differentials cost, since substitutability is a refinery-by-refinery fact and not a national average. Third, the decision points: what triggers a reserve release, what triggers demand-side measures, and who signs each, so that in the event nobody is looking for the authority while the clock runs. Attach the international options,

including approaches to other producers and to the International Energy Agency mechanisms available to an Association country, and state honestly what is not available to India because it is not a member.

Q3. An interview board asks whether India should stop buying oil from a sanctioned country in order to protect a larger trading relationship.

Approach: Answer that the question is one of price, not principle, and say so without embarrassment. The case for continuing is that energy is a first-order national requirement, that the purchase is lawful under Indian law, and that yielding to extraterritorial pressure invites its repetition on other questions. The case for stopping is that a market which takes a large share of India's exports supports far more Indian livelihoods than the discount on crude is worth, and that a state which refuses to count that trade-off is being proud rather than strategic. The defensible position is to keep the option open, build the payment, shipping and insurance capacity that makes the option cheap to exercise, and avoid converting a commercial decision into a matter of national honour, because honour cannot be adjusted when the arithmetic changes.

4.4 Tehran Parades Volunteer Fighters as Washington Clears an F-35 Sale to Saudi Arabia

THE NEWS Hundreds of thousands of Iranians rallied on Friday in a government-organised show of defiance after months of war, pledging their readiness to take up arms in the biggest such demonstration since the United States and Israel attacked in February, agencies reported. Iran's government has sought to rally the people and stress national unity even as the economy worsens under a U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports and new U.S. sanctions. Estimates varied of the number volunteering for limited military training in an effort described as “Janfaday-e Iran”, or the “ones who sacrifice their lives for Iran”. Volunteers marched through downtown Tehran in combat uniform carrying flags as onlookers cheered, and state media have for days urged Iranians to join, saying training with assault rifles would begin soon. The volunteers would be an additional layer of security to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and the Basij militia, which has played a key role in quashing anti-government protests. Tehran's Guard chief, General Hassan Hassanzadeh, said more than 600,000 had registered, with over one million expected to take part in the training; on Friday morning the state broadcaster estimated over 300,000 people were on the streets. Some participants trampled the flags of the United States and Israel, and others chanted “Death to America” and “Death to Israel”. Marzieh Afaghi, 24, who attended with her toddler and husband, said she was there to tell U.S. President Donald Trump that “we Iranians have no fear about his threats against our homeland”. On the same day Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had struck an oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, saying the Togo-flagged Trend was targeted and detained after a fire broke out on board late on Thursday, which they called an attempted “illegal passage”; the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations agency reported a ship hit by an “unknown projectile”, causing a fire that was extinguished. Iran has maintained its hold on the strait as Washington presses its counter-blockade of Iranian ports, and wants to charge ships for passage, attacking vessels it accuses of circumventing its preferred route. Separately, The Economic Times reported that the U.S. Department of State said on Thursday it had approved the potential sale of Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning II fighter jets to Saudi Arabia, a step that would mark a significant policy shift, potentially altering the balance of military power in West Asia and testing Washington's definition of maintaining its ally Israel's “qualitative military edge”. Friday's events also suggested that hard-liners in Iran's leadership will be more prepared to suppress future demonstrations against the theocracy; in January, shortly before the war, Iran saw some of its largest nationwide protests in history, which began over the struggling economy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The United States and Israel attack Iran in February → a naval blockade and new sanctions worsen the Iranian economy → Tehran answers with mass mobilisation instead of concession → the Revolutionary Guards attack tankers to enforce a toll in the Strait of Hormuz → Washington clears F-35s for Saudi Arabia, reopening the question of Israel's qualitative military edge

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Iran has two armies, and the difference is the point —** The Islamic Republic maintains the regular armed forces, the Artesh, alongside the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

	created after the 1979 revolution to defend the revolution itself rather than only the state. The Basij is a mass volunteer paramilitary organisation operating under the Guard, used both for internal control and as a mobilisation reserve. The Supreme Leader, not the President, is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and appoints the heads of both the Artesh and the Guard, which is why a mobilisation announcement carries a domestic political meaning as well as a military one. 2. **Qualitative Military Edge is a statutory test in American law, not a slogan —** The United States has undertaken, in legislation enacted in 2008 amending its arms export law, to ensure that any proposed sale of defence articles to a state in West Asia will not adversely affect Israel's ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat while sustaining minimal damage and casualties. Every major regional sale must be assessed against that standard before approval. Israel has been the only operator of the F-35 in the region, and a sale to another regional state therefore forces an explicit judgment about what the commitment now means. 3. **An approval is one step in a long American process —** A foreign military sale begins with a request, is approved by the Department of State, is then notified by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to the United States Congress, and may be blocked by a joint resolution within a statutory review period; contract negotiation, production and delivery follow over years. A candidate who treats a State Department approval as a completed transfer will overstate the immediate consequence, while one who dismisses it as a formality will miss the signal it sends to every capital in the region. 4. **The law of the sea does not permit a toll on passage —** Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Article 26 provides that no charge may be levied upon foreign ships by reason only of their passage through the territorial sea, and Part III establishes transit passage through straits used for international navigation, which the coastal state may not suspend or impede. A naval blockade, for its part, is a belligerent measure in the law of armed conflict and has historically been treated as an act of war when imposed on a state's ports. Iran signed but has not ratified the Convention; the United States is not a party either. The legal architecture governing the Strait is therefore being contested by two states that are both outside the treaty.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **West Asia is examined through India's interests, not as area studies —** GS2 carries “effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests”. For India, West Asia means crude, the largest concentration of Indian nationals abroad, the largest source of inward remittances and now maritime routes. An answer that narrates the conflict without reaching those four exposures has not answered a GS2 question. 2. **Arms transfers and regional balance are a recurring theme —** Questions on the arms trade, on defence cooperation and on how external powers shape regional balances are regularly set. The F-35 approval offers a clean case study of a supplier state adjusting a long-standing commitment to one ally in order to manage a threat from a rival, and of the leverage that transfers of advanced platforms create. 3. **Freedom of navigation has become a standing question —** The Malacca Strait, the South China Sea, the Bab-el-Mandeb and now the Strait of Hormuz all raise the same legal issue in different waters, and the examiner has asked about the Indian Navy's role in securing sea lanes. Knowing the difference between innocent passage, transit passage and blockade is what allows a candidate to write about any of them precisely.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was established after the 1979 revolution and is distinct from Iran's regular armed forces, the Artesh; the Basij is a volunteer paramilitary force operating under the Guard. • Under Iran's constitutional arrangement the Supreme Leader is the commander-

	in-chief of the armed forces and appoints their commanders, while the President is the head of government. ● Article 26 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides that no charge may be levied upon foreign ships by reason only of their passage through the territorial sea. ● The United States undertook by legislation enacted in 2008 to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge, requiring that major arms transfers in the region be assessed against that standard. ● A foreign military sale by the United States requires State Department approval followed by notification of the proposed sale by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to Congress, which may block it by joint resolution within the statutory review period. ● Iran is a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was concluded in 2015 and the United States withdrew from it in 2018. ● The F-35 Lightning II is manufactured by Lockheed Martin; Israel has been the only operator of the aircraft in West Asia.
ANALYSIS	1. **A mass mobilisation is a domestic instrument before it is a military one —** Volunteers with limited rifle training add almost nothing against the air power and naval forces arrayed against Iran. What they add is a demonstration that the state can still put three hundred thousand people on a street, and a mechanism by which potential dissenters are enrolled into the structure that polices dissent. The report is explicit that the volunteers would supplement the Basij, the force that has quashed anti-government protests, and that in January, shortly before the war, Iran saw some of its largest nationwide protests in history over the economy. Arming a mobilised population is a wager that mobilisation produces loyalty rather than capacity — a wager regimes have lost before. 2. **Numbers announced in a mobilisation are claims, and should be handled as such —** Over 600,000 registered, over a million expected in training, over 300,000 on the street on Friday morning, with the report itself recording that estimates varied. These are figures released by the mobilising authority and by a state broadcaster, each of which has an interest in the total. The examinable skill here is not the number but the discipline of attributing it: a candidate who writes that a million Iranians have been mobilised has reported a press release as a fact, while one who writes that the Guard chief claimed over 600,000 registrations has written a sentence that will still be true when better information arrives. 3. **Charging for passage converts a chokepoint into a revenue source, and that is a distinct escalation —** Attacking a tanker to deter a hostile navy is a familiar, if unlawful, act of war. Attacking a tanker for taking the wrong route and then detaining it in order to enforce a payment is something else: it is the assertion of a sovereign right to toll an international strait, which the law of the sea specifically denies. The distinction matters because a toll, unlike an attack, creates a standing institution. Every shipowner who pays establishes a practice, and practices are far harder to dismantle after a ceasefire than a pattern of attacks, which stops when the fighting stops. 4. **The F-35 approval is the more consequential item on the page —** A rally, however large, is theatre. A State Department approval for fifth-generation aircraft to Saudi Arabia is a considered decision to dilute, or at least to reinterpret, a commitment the United States wrote into its own law in 2008. The reading that follows is that Washington now values the containment of Iran and the consolidation of a Gulf coalition above the strict preservation of Israel's technological margin — which, if it holds, is the largest change in the West Asian security architecture in years. The honest

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qualification is that an approval is not a sale, that Congress may yet act, and that delivery, if it comes, is years away; but the signal has already been sent and every capital in the region has read it.

5. Blockade and counter-blockade produce a mutual hostage, not a victor — The United States is blockading Iranian ports; Iran is interdicting traffic in the Strait of Hormuz. Neither can sustain economic pressure on the other without imposing costs on world shipping, insurance and energy prices, which means the pressure is being paid for by third parties, India prominently among them. This is why the conflict cannot be analysed as a bilateral contest: the mechanism of coercion on each side runs through neutral commerce, and the party that first finds the cost to neutrals politically intolerable will be constrained regardless of the military position.

6. For India the war has moved from a price problem to a presence problem — In its early phase the conflict reached India mainly as a crude price and a current account number. The Strait's near-closure, tanker attacks and the blockade make it a question of routes, of the safety of Indian seafarers who crew a substantial share of the world's merchant fleet, and of the contingency planning required for the largest Indian expatriate population anywhere. That shift changes which ministry owns the problem and which instruments matter — naval presence, evacuation capacity and consular reach rather than import arithmetic — and an answer that notices the shift is analysing rather than reporting.
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<tr><td>POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION</td><td>“The conflict in West Asia has confronted India with a set of exposures — energy, diaspora, remittances and maritime routes — that cannot all be protected by the same policy.” Discuss the choices before Indian foreign policy in the region. (15 marks, 250 words)</td></tr>
<tr><td>MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION</td><td>
1. Introduction — State the four exposures at the outset and note that they pull in different directions: the crude relationship argues for accommodation with producers, the diaspora and remittances argue for good relations with host governments, and maritime security argues for alignment with the navies that police the sea lanes. One line on the present conflict as the situation in which these tensions have become visible.

2. Body — set out the exposures with specifics — Use the Strait of Hormuz and the tanker attacks for routes; the size of the Indian population in the Gulf and the remittance flow for the diaspora; and the share of crude originating in the region for energy. Mention Indian seafarers, who are affected by the attacks directly and are usually omitted from such answers.

3. Body — show where the exposures conflict — Explain that protecting shipping may require naval cooperation with partners whom Iran treats as belligerents; that maintaining energy ties with one producer strains ties with its rival; and that evacuation planning depends on the goodwill of governments that may themselves be parties. Name the trade-offs rather than asserting that India balances them all.

4. Body — set out the instruments India actually has — Strategic reserves and route diversification through ports outside the Strait; naval deployment for escort and anti-piracy tasks already performed in the Arabian Sea; a demonstrated evacuation capacity, with Operation Raahat in Yemen in 2015 and Operation Ajay in 2023 as precedents; and relationships in the region deep enough that India can speak to parties that cannot speak to each other.

5. Conclusion — Conclude that India's comparative advantage in West Asia is that it is trusted by antagonists simultaneously, that this advantage is consumed by taking sides and replenished by delivering practical goods such as evacuation, relief and trade, and
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that the objective should be to keep every exposure survivable rather than to make any one of them secure.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the head of a contingency cell in the Ministry of External Affairs. Reports of tanker attacks are increasing and there are Indian crew aboard vessels in the area. What do you set in motion?

Approach: Establish the facts before the narrative does: obtain from the shipping regulator and the recognised manning agencies a live list of Indian seafarers by vessel, route and employer, because in every such episode the first forty-eight hours are lost establishing who is actually at risk. Open a single helpline for families and publish the number, since relatives will otherwise call five ministries and receive five answers. Instruct missions in the littoral states to secure in advance the permissions needed for a disembarkation, medical treatment and repatriation, so that they are not being negotiated while a crew waits at anchor. And be candid with families about what is known and unknown, giving fixed times at which you will update them even if there is nothing new; predictable communication is what prevents distress from turning into panic.

Q2. You are the Indian ambassador in a Gulf capital. The host government asks India to endorse its position on the conflict in a joint statement. Refusing may cost you goodwill. What do you do?

Approach: Decline the endorsement but not the conversation. Explain, privately and in person rather than by note, that India's usefulness to this country rests on its ability to speak to every party, and that a public endorsement would purchase a headline at the cost of the access that will matter when a citizen needs to be evacuated or an oil cargo needs to move. Then offer something concrete in place of words, whether on humanitarian assistance, energy supply arrangements, or the security of the Indian workforce that keeps this economy running, because an ally who declines to sign but arrives with practical help is remembered better than one who signs and does nothing. Report the request upward the same day with your recommendation; the worst outcome is a Minister learning of it from the host government.

Q3. An interview board asks how India should respond when a foreign power's arms transfer alters the balance in a region where India has interests.

Approach: Say first that India is not a party to that decision and should not pretend to a veto it does not have; the useful question is what India does about the consequences. Those consequences are practical — the security environment of the sea lanes India depends on, the demands that regional states will make of India's own defence relationships, and the openings that arise for Indian defence cooperation as states hedge against a single supplier. The correct posture is to strengthen its own bilateral defence relationships across the region without joining any bloc, to keep speaking to the states now disadvantaged by the transfer, and to avoid public commentary on another state's sovereign export decision, which achieves nothing and forecloses conversations India will want later.

5. Environment & Ecology

Two stories about natural systems India can measure but cannot control. On the ocean floor, a country that has built the machines to mine at 5,270 metres is being asked whether it should mine at all, because the ecosystem it would disturb is still being discovered. In the atmosphere, a strengthening El Niño and a 15% rainfall deficit have shown up not in a hydrological bulletin but in a record September power peak and a doubled electricity price. One card is about restraint before an irreversible act; the other about a country absorbing a climate shock it did not choose, and measuring it by accident.

5.1 Three ISA Contracts, 366 Million Tonnes of Nodules, and the Case Against Mining Them

THE NEWS Writing in The Hindu, marine biologist P. Ragavan argues that the central question at India's deep-sea frontier is not how deep the country can go or how much it can mine, but whether everything that can be technologically exploited should necessarily be exploited. The article sets out the scale of the existing footprint. India holds three International Seabed Authority exploration contracts covering approximately 95,000 square kilometres across the Central Indian Ocean Basin, the Central Indian Ridge and the Carlsberg Ridge, all within the international seabed area. Exploration under these contracts has identified an estimated 366 million tonnes of polymetallic nodules containing nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese, alongside extensive environmental and biodiversity studies. Under the Deep Ocean Mission, India is developing deep-sea mining technology and underwater robotics and building the MATSYA-6000 human submersible, while the National Institute of Ocean Technology has tested a mining machine at a depth of about 5,270 metres. Biodiversity surveys across 19 seamounts have studied around 1,300 deep-sea organisms, of which nearly 23 species have been reported as new to science. Ragavan treats these achievements as imposing a responsibility rather than conferring a licence, and warns against the assumption that if something can be exploited it should be. He accepts that deep-sea minerals may have legitimate strategic importance for India's renewable-energy, electric-mobility and advanced-manufacturing ambitions, but insists that strategic importance cannot automatically become ecological permission and that necessity must be demonstrated, not presumed: before extraction India should ask whether the minerals are genuinely necessary at the proposed scale, whether alternatives exist, and whether demand can be reduced through recycling, efficiency, substitution and a circular economy. Exploration, he writes, can advance knowledge, biodiversity assessment, environmental baselines and technology without leading to exploitation, whereas mining would physically disturb the seabed, so adaptive management alone cannot guarantee ecological protection. Because India's ISA activities remain at the exploration stage, he argues this is the right time to establish a high ecological threshold, replacing the question "How can we mine with minimum damage?" with "Do we need to mine at all?" He locates the argument within Mission LiFE, Nature-based Solutions, the Sustainable Development Goals and the circular economy, and urges India to become a global leader not only in deep-sea technology but in deep-sea ecological governance.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

UNCLOS declares the international seabed the common heritage of mankind → the ISA licenses exploration and India takes three contracts over 95,000 sq km → the Deep Ocean Mission builds submersibles and a miner tested at 5,270 m → the same surveys turn up nearly 23 species new to science → capability arrives before the ecosystem is understood → the demand shifts from mining carefully to deciding whether to mine

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **The seabed beyond national jurisdiction belongs to nobody, which is why it needed an authority —** Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 defines "the Area" as the seabed and ocean floor and its subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and declares the Area and its resources the common heritage of mankind. No State may claim or exercise sovereignty over any part of it, and no State or person may appropriate any part of it. Activities in the Area are to be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole, with particular consideration for the interests of developing States. This is why an Indian contract in the Central Indian Ocean Basin is held from an international body and not asserted as a national right. 2. **The ISA is both the licensor and the environmental regulator of the same activity —** The International Seabed Authority was established under UNCLOS together with the 1994 Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI, and is headquartered in

	Kingston, Jamaica. Its principal organs are the Assembly, the Council and the Secretariat, with the Enterprise as the organ intended to carry out activities in the Area directly. Article 145 obliges the Authority to ensure effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects of activities in the Area. Exploration regulations already exist for polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; the exploitation regulations, commonly called the Mining Code, have been under negotiation for years and are not yet adopted. 3. **A contractor is sponsored by a State, and the sponsoring State carries obligations —** Exploration contracts are granted to States Parties or to entities sponsored by a State Party, which is the route through which national agencies and companies reach the Area. In its 2011 advisory opinion the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea held that a sponsoring State owes an obligation of due diligence to ensure the contractor complies, including application of the precautionary approach and environmental impact assessment, rather than an absolute guarantee of result. India's three contracts therefore make the Indian State, and not only its scientific agencies, answerable for what is done on that seabed. 4. **The Deep Ocean Mission is the domestic vehicle, and Samudrayaan is its most visible component —** The Deep Ocean Mission is run by the Ministry of Earth Sciences and implemented substantially through the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai. Its components span deep-sea mining technology and a manned submersible, ocean climate change advisory services, deep-sea biodiversity exploration and conservation, deep-ocean survey and exploration, energy and freshwater from the ocean, and an advanced marine station for ocean biology. Samudrayaan is the crewed submersible programme, with MATSYA-6000 designed to carry a three-member crew to a depth of about 6,000 metres. The Mission sits under the broader Blue Economy framework, and its stated purpose covers both resource assessment and ecosystem understanding.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The syllabus wording fits this almost exactly —** GS3 carries "conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment" and GS3 also carries "awareness in the fields of IT, space, computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology". A deep-sea mission that is simultaneously a robotics programme, a biodiversity survey and an extractive proposal sits in both, and GS2 supplies the international-institutions angle through UNCLOS and the ISA. 2. **Critical minerals have become a recurring frame —** Nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese are the inputs of batteries and electrification, and the examiner has repeatedly asked about import dependence in critical minerals and about strategic autonomy in supply chains. The value of this article is that it supplies the counter-argument to that frame — that demand reduction, recycling and substitution are policy options, not merely aspirations — and answers that carry both sides read better than those that carry one. 3. **The commons is a favourite conceptual hook —** Antarctica, outer space, the high seas and the deep seabed are the classic global commons, and UPSC has asked about governance of the commons in both Prelims and Mains. "Common heritage of mankind" is the phrase to know, and the deep seabed is the cleanest example of a regime built on it, because appropriation is expressly barred rather than merely discouraged.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Area, under Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, is the seabed and ocean floor and its subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and it and its resources are the common heritage of mankind; no State may claim sovereignty over any part of it.

- The International Seabed Authority was established under UNCLOS read with the 1994 Implementation Agreement, is headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica, and has an Assembly, a Council, a Secretariat and the Enterprise; Article 145 charges it with protecting the marine environment from activities in the Area.
- ISA exploration regulations exist for three resource categories — polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; the exploitation regulations, known as the Mining Code, are still under negotiation.
- India holds three ISA exploration contracts covering approximately 95,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin, the Central Indian Ridge and the Carlsberg Ridge.
- The Deep Ocean Mission is implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences, with the National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai as the lead technical agency; Samudrayaan is its crewed submersible programme and MATSYA-6000 is designed to carry three persons to about 6,000 metres depth.
- Under the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other Maritime Zones Act, 1976, India's territorial sea extends to 12 nautical miles, the contiguous zone to 24 and the exclusive economic zone to 200 nautical miles from the baseline; the Area lies beyond national jurisdiction altogether.
- The precautionary principle and the polluter-pays principle were held to be part of the law of India in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India, 1996; Article 48A is a Directive Principle and Article 51A(g) a Fundamental Duty relating to the environment.

ANALYSIS

1. **The strongest fact in the article is the one about new species, and it cuts against mining —** Surveys of 19 seamounts examined around 1,300 organisms and found nearly 23 reported as new to science. That ratio is the argument. If a modest survey effort in a small part of one ocean basin yields that many previously undescribed organisms, the honest inference is that the baseline against which mining damage would be measured does not yet exist. Environmental impact assessment presupposes a known pre-impact state; in the deep sea, the pre-impact state is still being discovered while the extraction technology is already being tested at 5,270 metres. That inversion of sequence, and not any general sentiment about nature, is what makes the precautionary case here unusually strong.
2. **"Adaptive management cannot guarantee protection" is a technical claim, not a rhetorical one —** Adaptive management works where an intervention can be scaled back and the system recovers within a policy-relevant timeframe. Abyssal nodule fields accumulate over millions of years and the sediment plume from a mining run settles over a far wider area than the track itself. If recovery times exceed human institutional horizons, the feedback loop that adaptive management depends on never closes — the manager learns the outcome long after the decision can be reversed. The counter-view deserves a hearing: proponents argue that seabed mining displaces terrestrial mining with far heavier human and forest costs, and that argument is not frivolous. But it is an argument about comparative damage, which is exactly the frame Ragavan is refusing.
3. **India is well placed to argue for restraint precisely because it is not a laggard —** A country with no capability that urges caution is easily dismissed as rationalising its own backwardness. India holds three contracts, has surveyed 95,000 square kilometres, has built a submersible programme and has tested a miner at abyssal depth. That record buys the standing to argue for a high ecological threshold without the argument being read as protectionism or as an attempt to freeze others out. This is the diplomatic point the article implies but does not make: restraint is credible only from the capable.

	4. **The demand-side argument is the weakest link in practice, and should be stated as such —** Recycling, efficiency, substitution and circularity are real levers, but they operate on a stock of metal already in use, and India's stock of batteries and electrical infrastructure is small and growing fast. Circularity cannot supply a demand curve that is still climbing steeply; it becomes powerful only once deployment matures. An answer that repeats "circular economy" without noticing this timing problem is repeating a slogan. The defensible version is narrower: demand reduction changes the scale and the date at which extraction becomes necessary, which is enough to justify deferring an irreversible decision, and that is all the article needs it to do. 5. **The institutional gap is that the Mining Code is being written by the body that issues contracts —** The ISA licenses exploration, collects fees from contractors and is simultaneously the guardian of the marine environment under Article 145. Combining promotion and regulation in one institution is a design that Indian administrative experience has repeatedly found unsatisfactory, which is why pollution control boards, sectoral regulators and appellate tribunals were separated out. The absence of an adopted exploitation code is usually described as a delay; it is better read as an unresolved conflict of function, and India's position on how that conflict should be settled is a more consequential intervention than anything it says about its own contracts. 6. **Strategic necessity and ecological permission are genuinely separable, and the article is right to separate them —** The claim that critical minerals are needed for electrification is true and the claim that they must therefore come from the seabed is a separate proposition requiring separate proof — about quantity, about alternative sources, about price and about timing. Collapsing the two is the commonest move in resource politics, and it is the move that makes every strategic sector immune to environmental scrutiny. The examinable formulation is Ragavan's own: necessity must be demonstrated, not presumed.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Technological capability to exploit a resource is not, by itself, a justification for exploiting it." Examine this proposition with reference to India's deep-sea exploration programme and the international regime governing the seabed beyond national jurisdiction. (250 words, 15 marks)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the Area under Part XI of UNCLOS and the common heritage of mankind principle in one sentence, and state India's position concretely — three ISA exploration contracts over about 95,000 square kilometres with an assessed 366 million tonnes of polymetallic nodules. Begin with the legal status, not with the technology, because the whole answer turns on the fact that this seabed is not India's to decide about alone. 2. **Body — establish the capability honestly —** The Deep Ocean Mission, the MATSYA-6000 submersible under Samudrayaan, and the NIOT mining machine tested at about 5,270 metres. Concede that the strategic case is real: nickel, copper, cobalt and manganese feed electrification and advanced manufacturing, and import dependence in critical minerals is a live vulnerability. An answer that does not state the case for mining cannot credibly evaluate it. 3. **Body — set out the scientific uncertainty as evidence, not as sentiment —** Use the survey numbers: 19 seamounts, around 1,300 organisms studied, nearly 23 species new to science. Argue that environmental impact assessment requires a baseline that does not yet exist, that seabed disturbance and sediment plumes are effectively irreversible on policy timescales, and that adaptive management therefore cannot substitute for a prior threshold decision. 4. **Body — locate the argument in law and in institutions —** The precautionary principle

from Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration and Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum, 1996; Article 145 of UNCLOS; the unadopted exploitation regulations; the due-diligence obligation of the sponsoring State recognised by the Seabed Disputes Chamber in 2011. This is the paragraph that separates a good answer from a general one, because it converts a moral intuition into an obligation with a source.

5. **Conclusion —** Do not end with a demand for a moratorium, which the question does not ask for. End with the sequencing point: India should complete baselines, press for exploitation regulations that place the burden of demonstrating necessity on the applicant, and treat exploration as knowledge-building that carries no commitment to extraction. Restraint exercised from a position of capability is a stronger international contribution than either mining first or abstaining loudly.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences. A note is put up seeking clearance to move from exploration to a pilot mining test in the contract area, on the ground that the technology is ready and the contract permits it. What do you record?

Approach: Separate the two questions the note has merged — whether the technology is ready and whether the ecological baseline is adequate — and record that only the first has been answered. Ask for the specific deliverable that is missing: a documented pre-disturbance baseline for the test block covering species assemblage, sediment characteristics and plume behaviour, with the monitoring protocol and the recovery indicators fixed before the test, not after. Note that a pilot test is defensible precisely because it is the last reversible step, and that its value lies in what it measures, so approving it without a measurement plan wastes the only opportunity to learn cheaply. Recommend that the file also record what India will report to the ISA, because a sponsoring State that documents its own due diligence is in a far stronger position later than one that has to reconstruct it.

Q2. You represent India at an ISA Council session. A sponsoring State is pressing for early adoption of the exploitation regulations, arguing that further delay itself creates legal uncertainty. India's scientific agencies want to protect their contract rights. What position do you take?

Approach: Take the position that India wants the regulations adopted and wants them to contain a threshold, because those are not opposing demands. Delay does create uncertainty and the argument for closure is legitimate; the question is what gets closed. Push for an applicant's burden to demonstrate necessity and to establish a baseline, for independent review of environmental impact statements rather than review by the licensing body alone, and for a regional environmental management plan covering the Indian Ocean basins comparable to what exists elsewhere. Protecting contract rights and insisting on a high standard are compatible, since a weak code would expose Indian contractors to the same reputational and liability risk it exposes everyone to.

Q3. A television debate asks you, as the Mission director, whether India is ceding the deep sea to China by hesitating. You are on record supporting strong environmental conditions. How do you answer?

Approach: Answer the factual part first and without defensiveness: India holds three exploration contracts, has tested a mining machine at abyssal depth and is building a crewed submersible, so the premise that India is absent is wrong. Then make the distinction plainly — India is not hesitating about capability, it is deliberating about extraction, and those are different decisions. Say that no country can appropriate the Area under UNCLOS, so the framing of a race for territory misdescribes the legal position. Avoid the temptation to match the rhetoric by promising a timeline for mining; a public commitment made in a studio is the worst possible way to settle a question that the scientific evidence has not yet settled.

5.2 A Strengthening El Niño, a 15% Rainfall Deficit and a Record 269 GW September Power Peak

THE NEWS The Economic Times reports that the south-west monsoon has remained deficient this season while El Niño has strengthened during it, leaving parts of the country with lower soil moisture and raising concerns over reservoir status; States have been asked to assess district-wise residual soil moisture and reservoir and groundwater availability. The clearest measurement of that deficit appeared not in a hydrological bulletin but in the electricity market. Peak power demand hit a record 269 GW on September 10, which the paper describes as unusually high for the month. Indian Energy Exchange joint managing director Rohit Bajaj said that peak demand reached 269 GW on September 10 and attributed the strength to a 15% deficit in rainfall, the likely withdrawal of the monsoon from northwest India and higher temperatures, which together increased cooling and irrigation demand. On the supply side, he said lower hydro generation and temporary seasonal disruptions affecting coal availability had tightened supply and increased demand on the power exchanges; India has stepped up supplies from thermal power plants to meet the high-demand scenario driven by cooling and irrigation over the usual growth. The market registered the squeeze precisely. The High Price Day-Ahead Market on the exchange rallied through much of September, and IEX data for September 6-17 shows the HP-DAM daily market clearing price reaching its ceiling of ₹20 per unit, with most trade in time blocks of non-solar hours and a sharp rise in purchase bids. HP-DAM is the segment of the integrated day-ahead market designed for higher variable-cost generators — gas-based plants, imported-coal generation and battery energy storage systems. In the regular day-ahead market, purchase bids significantly exceeded sell bids in several recent trading sessions and the market clearing price reached ₹10 per unit in multiple time blocks; the average clearing price for September 1-17 was ₹7.83 per unit, more than double the figure for the same period a year earlier. Bajaj said HP-DAM is helping meet critical power requirements during this phase of tight supply.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

El Niño strengthens through the season → the south-west monsoon runs about 15% deficient and begins withdrawing from northwest India → higher temperatures and depleted soil moisture raise cooling and groundwater-pumping demand → reservoir inflows fall, so hydro generation drops just as demand peaks → peak demand touches a record 269 GW and supply shifts to thermal and high-variable-cost plants → exchange prices double and the high-price segment sits at its ₹20 ceiling in non-solar hours

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **El Niño is a phase of a coupled ocean-atmosphere oscillation, not a weather event —** The El Niño-Southern Oscillation describes linked variation in sea-surface temperature and atmospheric pressure across the tropical Pacific. In the El Niño phase the central and eastern Pacific warm, the south-east trade winds weaken, and the Walker Circulation shifts eastward so that the ascending limb of convection moves away from the maritime continent towards the central Pacific. For India this statistically suppresses monsoon rainfall, but the relationship is probabilistic, not deterministic, and several El Niño years have produced normal Indian rainfall. La Niña is the opposite phase, and the Southern Oscillation Index, based on the pressure difference between Tahiti and Darwin, is the atmospheric measure of the same system.
2. **The Indian Ocean Dipole is the second control and can cancel the first —** The Indian Ocean Dipole is the difference in sea-surface temperature between the western Arabian Sea and the eastern Indian Ocean off Indonesia. A positive dipole, with a warmer western pole, is generally favourable to the Indian monsoon and can partly offset the suppressing effect of an El Niño; a negative dipole compounds it. The Madden-Julian Oscillation governs intra-seasonal active and break spells, and Eurasian and Himalayan snow cover is the classic third predictor. The India Meteorological Department's seasonal forecasts combine statistical models built on such predictors with dynamical coupled ocean-atmosphere models, which is why a single El Niño reading never determines the official outlook.
3. **How rainfall is officially classified, and when the monsoon leaves —** Seasonal rainfall is expressed as a percentage of the Long Period Average: 96% to 104% of LPA is

	normal, 90% to 96% is below normal, and below 90% is deficient, with corresponding above-normal and excess categories at the upper end. The south-west monsoon normally sets in over Kerala around 1 June, covers the country by early July, and begins withdrawing from west Rajasthan around the middle of September — which is exactly the withdrawal the news refers to. The retreating monsoon then feeds the north-east monsoon from October to December, which is the principal rainy season for Tamil Nadu and the adjoining south-eastern coast. 4. **A rainfall deficit becomes an energy problem through storage, not through rain —** Reservoir live storage in the country's major reservoirs is monitored by the Central Water Commission, and groundwater levels by the Central Ground Water Board; both are the stocks that a monsoon either replenishes or does not. Hydroelectric generation depends on that storage, so a weak monsoon reduces generation and also removes the flexible peaking capacity that hydro supplies. At the same time higher temperatures raise cooling load and drier soils raise electric pumping for irrigation. Electricity exchanges operate under the Electricity Act, 2003 and are regulated by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, which is why segments such as the day-ahead market carry regulated price ceilings.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The monsoon is the most reliably examined physical phenomenon in the syllabus —** GS1 carries "important geophysical phenomena" and the climate of India; ENSO, the Indian Ocean Dipole, the jet streams and the mechanism of onset and withdrawal recur in Prelims almost every cycle. The examiner asks for mechanism — why the Walker Circulation shift matters — rather than for the season's numbers, so the physical chain is what must be memorised. 2. **Climate-energy-water linkage is where GS1 and GS3 now meet —** GS3 carries energy, infrastructure and conservation. A story in which a rainfall deficit reduces hydro generation while raising cooling and pumping demand is exactly the kind of cross-sectoral chain the paper has begun to favour, because it cannot be answered from any single standard chapter. 3. **Adaptation has displaced mitigation as the examinable question —** Earlier questions asked about India's emission commitments and international negotiation. The more recent framing asks how a system absorbs a climate shock — which is what a record September peak, a depleted reservoir and a price ceiling being touched actually describe. Answers that treat climate purely as an emissions accounting problem now read as dated.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The El Niño-Southern Oscillation is a coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon of the tropical Pacific; in the El Niño phase the central and eastern Pacific warm, the trade winds weaken and the Walker Circulation shifts eastward, statistically suppressing the Indian south-west monsoon. • The Southern Oscillation Index measures the atmospheric pressure difference between Tahiti and Darwin and is the atmospheric component of ENSO; La Niña is the phase opposite to El Niño. • The Indian Ocean Dipole is defined by the sea-surface temperature difference between the western Arabian Sea and the eastern Indian Ocean near Indonesia; a positive phase is generally favourable to the Indian monsoon and can partly offset an El Niño. • The India Meteorological Department expresses seasonal rainfall as a percentage of the Long Period Average: 96% to 104% is normal, 90% to 96% is below normal, and below 90% is deficient. • The south-west monsoon normally sets in over Kerala around 1 June and begins

	withdrawing from west Rajasthan around mid-September; the retreating monsoon gives the north-east monsoon of October to December, the principal rainy season for Tamil Nadu. ● Live storage in India's major reservoirs is monitored by the Central Water Commission, and groundwater levels by the Central Ground Water Board; both function under the Ministry of Jal Shakti. ● Power exchanges function under the Electricity Act, 2003 and are regulated by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission; the High Price Day-Ahead Market is the segment of the integrated day-ahead market meant for higher variable-cost generators, including gas-based plants, imported-coal generation and battery energy storage systems.
ANALYSIS	1. **The electricity market is the fastest and least-managed instrument for measuring a monsoon failure —** Rainfall departure figures are seasonal and reservoir bulletins are weekly, but the exchange prices a rainfall deficit every fifteen minutes. An average day-ahead clearing price of ₹7.83 per unit for September 1-17, more than double a year earlier, and a high-price segment sitting at its ₹20 ceiling in non-solar hours, are statements about hydrology written in rupees. Nobody is managing those numbers for presentational effect, which is precisely what makes them useful. A candidate who can read a power-market figure as a climate indicator is doing something more sophisticated than reciting the season's rainfall percentage. 2. **Hydro failure is a double loss, and the second half of it is the one that hurts —** A weak monsoon reduces hydro energy, which is the obvious loss. The less obvious and more serious loss is flexibility: hydro is despatchable within minutes and is what a system leans on at the evening peak. When storage is low, that peaking capacity is withdrawn at exactly the moment demand is highest, so the system must call on gas, imported coal and storage — which is the description of the HP-DAM segment itself. The price at the ceiling is therefore not merely scarcity; it is the cost of replacing flexibility, not just energy. 3. **"Non-solar hours" is the single most structurally revealing phrase in the report —** Most HP-DAM trade clustered in non-solar hours. India has added very large solar capacity, which flattens the midday problem and concentrates the difficulty into the evening ramp when solar output collapses and demand does not. A monsoon deficit stresses precisely that window, because cooling load persists after sunset and hydro is unavailable to cover it. The lesson generalises beyond this season: as the solar share rises, the binding constraint moves from energy to timing, and storage rather than capacity becomes the correct policy answer. 4. **Irrigation pumping is a maladaptive feedback loop and should be named as one —** Less rain means less soil moisture, which means more groundwater pumping, which means more electricity demand, which in a tight year is met by thermal generation. The response to a climate shock therefore raises the emissions that drive the shock, while simultaneously drawing down the aquifer that is the buffer against the next one. This is an adaptation trap, and it is invisible in any framework that counts only rainfall or only emissions. The honest qualification is that the alternative — not pumping — is not available to the farmer, so the fix has to be in pump efficiency, solarised pumping and groundwater regulation rather than in exhortation. 5. **Attributing a 15% deficit to El Niño is plausible but not demonstrated, and the distinction matters —** ENSO suppresses Indian monsoon rainfall statistically, and India has recorded normal rainfall in El Niño years and deficits in neutral ones. A strengthening El Niño alongside a 15% deficit is consistent with the relationship; it does not establish it for this season, because the Indian Ocean Dipole, intra-seasonal variability and the timing of withdrawal all contribute. The counter-view is worth

	stating plainly: treating every deficit as an El Niño event encourages a fatalism about forecasting that the science does not support, and it obscures the years when the deficit had a different cause and a different remedy. 6. **The price signal stops before it reaches the people who could respond to it —** Exchange prices doubled, but the household running an air conditioner and the farmer running a pump saw a regulated retail tariff, often heavily subsidised for agriculture. The scarcity was absorbed by distribution companies rather than transmitted to demand, so the one mechanism that could have moderated consumption in a tight fortnight was switched off by design. There is a real defence of that design, since exposing households to a ₹20 ceiling would be both regressive and politically impossible. But the consequence should be stated rather than assumed away: in a climate-stressed year, India manages peak demand almost entirely on the supply side, and that is a choice with a cost.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In a climate-stressed year the failure of the monsoon is registered as much in India's power system as in its reservoirs." Explain the physical mechanism linking an El Niño-driven rainfall deficit to electricity demand and supply in India, and examine what this linkage implies for climate adaptation. (250 words, 15 marks)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the mechanism, not the season. One sentence defining ENSO and the eastward shift of the Walker Circulation that suppresses monsoon convection over India, and one sentence stating that the relationship is statistical rather than deterministic. That qualification, placed early, signals that you understand the science rather than a headline about it. 2. **Body — carry the chain from the Pacific to the grid —** Warming of the central and eastern Pacific and weakened trade winds; suppressed monsoon rainfall and early withdrawal from northwest India; depleted soil moisture and reduced reservoir live storage; falling hydro generation; rising cooling load and groundwater pumping. Use the concrete anchors — a 15% rainfall deficit and a record peak demand of 269 GW on 10 September — as illustration, not as the argument. 3. **Body — explain why the system strains at particular hours —** Distinguish energy from capacity and from flexibility. Hydro is lost as both energy and despatchable peaking power; solar covers midday but not the evening ramp, which is why the high-price segment clusters in non-solar hours; the marginal supply becomes gas, imported coal and battery storage. This paragraph is where most answers will stop at "demand rose", and where marks are available. 4. **Body — draw out the adaptation implications, including the uncomfortable ones —** Name the feedback loop: a rainfall deficit raises pumping, which raises thermal generation, which raises emissions while the aquifer buffer is drawn down. Note that regulated retail tariffs mean the scarcity price does not reach consumers, so adaptation is almost entirely supply-side. Mention storage, solar pumping, irrigation efficiency and groundwater regulation as the structural responses. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude on measurement and institutions rather than on exhortation: India's climate exposure is now visible in coupled indicators — reservoir storage, groundwater levels and peak demand together — and adaptation planning should be organised around that coupling rather than around any single ministry's data. Avoid ending with a list of schemes.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the District Collector of a district with a rainfall deficit of about 15%. Borewell deepening applications are rising sharply and the power utility reports load on agricultural feeders at record levels. What do you do?**

Approach: Recognise that deepening is a rational individual response producing a collective disaster, so an appeal to restraint will fail. Get the observation-well data and identify the blocks where the water table has fallen fastest, and treat those differently from the district as a whole rather than issuing one uniform order. Coordinate with the utility on feeder-level supply scheduling, because fixed, announced hours for agricultural feeders reduce the wasteful pumping that uncertainty produces and are easier to enforce than a restriction on pumping itself. Protect drinking water sources first and in writing, since the competition between drinking and irrigation demand is the one that will reach you as a law-and-order problem. And record the deficit and the groundwater trend formally now, because whatever relief framework is invoked later will depend on documentation created in these weeks.

Q2. As Collector you must decide priority for releases from the district's main reservoir in a deficit year: drinking water, irrigation, or the hydro station that the State grid is depending on at the evening peak. How do you approach it?

Approach: Start from the position that this is not your discretion alone to exercise — reservoir operation follows an approved rule curve and inter-departmental protocol, and a Collector who improvises on it creates a precedent that will be used against the next Collector. Within that, drinking water has first claim and should be stated as non-negotiable at the first meeting so that the rest of the negotiation happens honestly. Ask the water resources department for the storage trajectory to the end of the dry season rather than the current level, because a release that is affordable today may not be. Make the decision in a recorded meeting with the utility, water resources and irrigation present together, and publish the reasoning; in a scarcity year, the perception that the allocation was made quietly does more damage than the allocation itself.

Q3. The State is preparing a climate adaptation plan and asks you what the district actually needs. You know that the usual answer is a list of schemes. What do you send?

Approach: Send indicators before interventions. Ask that the district be assessed on coupled data — reservoir storage, groundwater depth by block, and agricultural feeder load — because each of those alone conceals what the others reveal, and no existing report puts them on one page. Then propose a small number of things that change the physical system rather than fund activity: solarised and efficient pumps in the blocks with the steepest water-table decline, restoration of the specific tanks that recharge those blocks, and a groundwater management plan with a legal basis rather than an advisory one. Be candid that adaptation in this district is mostly about water and electricity behaving as one system, and that a plan written by either department alone will miss it.

6. Health & Life Sciences

Three stories about the same missing thing: assurance. A counterfeit drug network that moved cancer injections into more than ninety hospitals before an agricultural labourer noticed a heap of waste; a drug regulator that proposes in the same week to centralise licensing of sterile injectables and to let generic makers start studies on intimation rather than permission; and a district women's hospital in Bundi where two more women died after caesarean sections, taking Rajasthan's count to nineteen maternal deaths in three months. In each case the patient had no way of verifying what she was being given or who was answerable for it. The examinable question is not whether Indian medicine is cheap — it is whether the regulatory state that stands behind it has the people, the powers and the willingness to be held to account.

6.1 Counterfeit Cancer and Antibiotic Injections Traced From a Bengaluru Farmhouse to Wholesaler Krupa Healthcare

THE NEWS In mid-August an agricultural labourer in C.K. Tandya village in South Bengaluru district, formerly Ramanagara, along the Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway, noticed a heap of medical waste on a strip of farmland and reported it to the beat police at Taverekere police station. Villagers had already been whispering about men entering the eight-acre walled farmhouse on a scooter without a number plate and about courier and e-commerce vehicles making regular trips to the secluded property, which the police say had been rented about a year earlier. After surveillance, the police and Karnataka's health department entered the premises, found labels, medicine boxes and packaging material, and joined officers of the State Drugs Control Department for a raid on August 18. Four people were taken into custody. Investigators say low-cost, substandard or expired formulations procured from other States were transferred into fresh vials and given counterfeit labels so that they would appear to be genuine products of established pharmaceutical companies. The seizure included more than 5,600 vials of counterfeit antibiotic injections and was valued at ₹4.91 crore; ledgers, invoices and mobile phones gave the police the supply chain. A Special Investigation Team traced the trail to Krupa Healthcare, a wholesale pharmaceutical distributor in Bengaluru, whose owner Veeresh Kumar Jain was arrested; the police say he employed more than 15 medical representatives and paid commissions to push stock offered to hospitals at discounts of up to 50%. The counterfeits included critical-care injections and cancer medicines. Simultaneous searches followed across Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Telangana, and the police are hunting Bengaluru resident R. Prashant, said to be Jain's partner and currently in Azerbaijan. The suspect medicines have reached more than 90 hospitals and clinics. Karnataka has published the list of antibiotics seized in the Bidadi raid but not the oncology drugs, the batch numbers or the hospitals; Health Minister U.T. Khader told The Hindu the full list had gone to the Union government and all States but that disclosure was for the SIT to make.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cancer drugs priced beyond reach → a discount market grows around desperate buyers → expired stock is revialled at a rented farmhouse → a wholesaler with medical representatives pushes it at 50% off → it enters 90-plus hospitals → a labourer reports dumped waste and the chain becomes visible

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Section 17B is the definition the whole case turns on** — The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 distinguishes three defects. Section 17 defines a misbranded drug, Section 17A an adulterated drug, and Section 17B a spurious drug — one that imitates or is a substitute for another, or is labelled or presented in a manner likely to deceive, or purports to be the product of a manufacturer of whom it is not truly a product. Section 18 prohibits the manufacture, sale, stocking, distribution and exhibition for sale of such drugs. A drug that merely fails a quality test is 'not of standard quality' under Section 16; a drug wearing another company's identity is spurious, and the punishment is far heavier. 2. **Regulation is split between the Centre and the States by design** — The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India under the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, approves new drugs, clinical trials and imports and lays down standards. Licensing of manufacture, sale and distribution, and the inspectorate that enforces it,

	sit largely with State Drugs Control Departments. This is why a network operating across six States is investigated by one State's Special Investigation Team, and why the Karnataka minister's remedy was to circulate a list to other States rather than to act in them. 3. **Two statutory bodies advise, and candidates confuse them —** Section 5 of the Act creates the Drugs Technical Advisory Board, which advises the Central and State governments on technical matters arising out of the administration of the Act. Section 7 creates the Drugs Consultative Committee, whose function is to advise on securing uniformity across India in the administration of the Act. The first is technical, the second is about harmonising how the States apply the law — a distinction that matters precisely in a case like this one. 4. **The Mashelkar Committee said this in 2003 and the diagnosis has not changed —** The expert committee chaired by R.A. Mashelkar, constituted to examine drug regulatory issues including the problem of spurious drugs, recommended a strengthened and better-staffed central regulator, uniform enforcement across States and deterrent punishment. The Act was subsequently amended in 2008 to make the manufacture or sale of spurious drugs likely to cause death or grievous hurt punishable with imprisonment of not less than ten years extending to life, and to allow States to set up special courts. The shortfall since has been in inspectorate capacity and prosecution, not in the text of the statute.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **This sits squarely in the GS2 health governance box —** The syllabus asks about 'issues relating to development and management of social sector/services relating to health' and about 'statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies'. A spurious-drug network is the cleanest available illustration of a regulatory body whose powers are adequate on paper and whose field presence is not. 2. **Regulatory capacity is a recurring Mains theme, not a one-off —** The paper has repeatedly asked why Indian regulators under-deliver — on food safety, on pharmaceuticals, on medical education. The productive answer is always the same three-part one: fragmented jurisdiction, understaffed inspectorates, and penalties that are severe in statute but rarely imposed. This story supplies fresh, dated evidence for all three. 3. **Ethics papers like the informed-consent angle —** Patients treated with suspect stock have not been told. The duty to disclose a risk already incurred, when disclosure will cause distress and cannot undo the harm, is a standard GS4 dilemma and here it comes with named institutions and a live investigation.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Drugs Rules, 1945 are the parent legislation for the manufacture, sale, distribution and import of drugs and cosmetics in India. ● Section 17B of the Act defines a spurious drug; Section 17 defines a misbranded drug; Section 17A defines an adulterated drug; Section 18 prohibits their manufacture, sale, stocking and distribution. ● Section 5 of the Act constitutes the Drugs Technical Advisory Board to advise on technical matters; Section 7 constitutes the Drugs Consultative Committee to advise on uniformity of administration across India. ● The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation functions under the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and is headed by the Drugs Controller General of India. ● Licensing and enforcement for manufacture, sale and distribution of drugs rest largely with State Drugs Control Departments, while approval of new drugs,

	clinical trials and imports is a central function. ● The All India Drug Action Network is a network of non-profit organisations working to increase access to and improve the rational use of essential medicines; the Drug Action Forum, Karnataka is one of its constituents. ● Following the 2008 amendment, manufacture or sale of spurious or adulterated drugs likely to cause death or grievous hurt is punishable with imprisonment of not less than ten years extending to imprisonment for life, and States may constitute special courts for trial of such offences.
ANALYSIS	1. **The detection came from a villager, which is the finding, not the colour —** A network with a rented farmhouse, more than fifteen medical representatives, inter-State procurement and distribution into ninety-odd hospitals ran for about a year and was surfaced by a labourer reporting dumped waste. No inspection, no sampling programme and no hospital procurement check caught it. The uncomfortable inference is that the counterfeits were not detected by the system at any point in the chain — which means the seizure number tells us what one raid recovered, not what the network moved. 2. **A 50% discount on an oncology injection should itself be a red flag to the buyer —** The police say stock was offered to hospitals at discounts of up to 50%, with commissions to medical representatives. Hospitals are sophisticated purchasers; a discount of that size on a patented critical-care product has no legitimate commercial explanation. The honest reading is that the counterfeiters exploited a procurement culture in which price is negotiated aggressively and provenance is not verified. That is a shared failure, and the lawyer S.V. Joga Rao's formulation — that the duties of hospitals and regulators operate concurrently though they differ in nature — is the right frame for an answer. 3. **Non-disclosure protects the investigation and abandons the patient —** Karnataka has released the antibiotic list but not the oncology drugs, the batch numbers or the hospitals. There is a real investigative reason: premature disclosure can let the accused destroy records and can trigger panic among patients mid-treatment. There is also a real countervailing duty, because a patient who does not know cannot ask her oncologist to re-examine a non-response. The defensible middle course is to give batch numbers and hospital names to treating institutions under confidence immediately, and to publish once the SIT files its report — what cannot be defended is telling neither the public nor the clinicians. 4. **The price of cancer medicine is the demand side of counterfeiting —** A single vial at ₹1,65,990, a course costing about ₹20 lakh, buy-one-get-one offers routed through referrals — Dr. Gopal Dabade's point that better access to good-quality affordable treatment is the crux is an economic claim, not a slogan. Where the legitimate price is far above what patients can pay, a parallel market forms, and enforcement alone cannot close a gap created by price. Patent-term expiry, compulsory licensing where warranted, and inclusion of high-cost oncology drugs in price control are therefore anti-counterfeiting measures as much as access measures. 5. **The harm from a fake cancer drug is uniquely hard to see —** Dr. Nitish Ranjan Acharya's observation deserves to be the centre of an answer: when a counterfeit oncology drug fails, the failure looks like disease progression or acquired resistance. The clinical signal that would normally expose a bad batch is absent, which means the usual pharmacovigilance feedback loop does not operate for exactly the class of drug where the stakes are highest. Detection here has to be upstream — at procurement and supply-chain verification — because it will not happen at the bedside. 6. **The counter-view is that naming hospitals now would destroy more than it saves —**

	It is worth stating the case against disclosure honestly. Publishing a list of ninety hospitals before the SIT has established which received counterfeit stock would brand institutions that bought in good faith, may collapse public confidence in private oncology care generally, and could lead patients to abandon treatment that is in fact working. The answer is not that transparency is costless; it is that the cost of concealment falls on individual patients who have no alternative source of information, while the cost of disclosure falls on institutions that can defend themselves.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A regulatory statute is only as strong as the inspectorate that enforces it." In the light of recent cases of spurious and substandard drugs entering the treatment chain, examine the structural weaknesses in India's drug regulatory architecture and suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the statutory architecture in two sentences — the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the Section 17B definition of a spurious drug, and the split under which the Centre approves while the States license and enforce. Do not open with the Bengaluru case; use it as evidence later, which is where an example belongs. 2. **Body — locate the weaknesses structurally, not anecdotally —** Four heads carry the answer: fragmented jurisdiction, so that an inter-State network faces one State's investigators; an under-resourced inspectorate, which is the point made by the Drug Action Forum that drug inspectors are the first line of foot soldiers but are not adequately equipped; weak prosecution despite severe statutory punishment after the 2008 amendment; and an absence of supply-chain traceability, so that authenticity cannot be verified at the point of dispensing. 3. **Body — bring in the demand side —** Argue that enforcement alone cannot close a market created by price. Use the cost of oncology therapy and the 50% discount offer to show that the counterfeit market exists because the legitimate one is unaffordable, and connect this to price control, generic substitution and the National List of Essential Medicines. 4. **Body — the accountability and disclosure question —** One short paragraph on what happens after detection: the duty of hospitals to trace and inform, the duty of regulators to publish batch numbers, and the tension with an ongoing investigation. This is where most answers stop at 'strict action should be taken' and lose the marks. 5. **Conclusion —** Recommend concretely and briefly — track-and-trace barcoding extended down to the retail pack, risk-based inspection using licensing and sampling data, a common national database of licences and prosecutions so that a person barred in one State cannot operate in another, and filling of drug inspector vacancies against the sanctioned norm. Close on the principle that a patient cannot verify a medicine and must therefore be able to rely on the State that licensed it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of a district where three hospitals appear on the confidential list of institutions that received suspect stock. The SIT has asked you not to disclose. A local newspaper has the list and is publishing tomorrow. What do you do tonight?** ***Approach:*** Accept that secrecy has already failed and spend the night preparing for disclosure rather than trying to prevent it. Inform the SIT immediately that the list is out, so that any evidence-preservation steps they need are taken before dawn. Convene the three hospital administrators and the Chief Medical Officer at once and require each hospital to reconcile its purchase records against the batch numbers overnight and to identify patients who received those batches. Have a helpline and a named nodal officer ready by morning, and a factual statement that says what is

known, what is not yet known and what a worried patient should do. The public will forgive an administration that was overtaken by events; it will not forgive one that was silent for another week after the story broke.

Q2. A private oncology hospital in your district tells you it bought the stock in good faith from a licensed wholesaler, has valid invoices, and will be ruined if named. It asks you to keep it out of the public statement. How do you respond?

Approach: Tell it plainly that the decision on naming is not yours to trade and that any assurance to the contrary would be worthless. Then be genuinely useful within the law: record its invoices and licence verification on the file, because good-faith purchase from a licensed dealer is material both to prosecution under the Act and to its own defence, and say so in the district's statement in general terms — that the institutions concerned purchased from a licensed distributor and are cooperating. Require it in return to write to every affected patient within seventy-two hours and to bear the cost of re-testing or re-treatment where clinically indicated. Reputation is protected by demonstrated conduct after the event, not by an administrator's silence.

Q3. You are the State Drugs Controller. Your inspectorate has a third of its sanctioned posts vacant and you are asked to guarantee that no counterfeit drug reaches a hospital in your State. What do you say, and what do you actually do?

Approach: Do not give a guarantee you cannot keep; say instead that you will make the probability of detection high enough to change the economics for the counterfeiter. Move from routine sampling to risk-based inspection — prioritise wholesalers whose purchase invoices show high-value oncology and critical-care products without a corresponding manufacturer authorisation, because that anomaly is already visible in returns you hold. Ask the government for the vacancies to be filled and put the request on record with the number of licensed premises per inspector, so that the capacity gap is documented rather than absorbed silently. And publish a quarterly report of samples drawn, failures found and prosecutions launched; a regulator that publishes its own shortfall is harder to ignore than one that reassures.

6.2 Dr Reddy's to Sell Takeda's Qdenga in India While the Drug Regulator Centralises and Liberalises at the Same Time

THE NEWS Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Japan's Takeda Pharmaceutical Company announced on Friday a distribution pact under which Dr Reddy's will distribute the dengue vaccine Qdenga across India's private market for paediatric and adult vaccination. Subject to completion of applicable processes with local authorities, the companies said the vaccine is anticipated to become available in the first half of 2027. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation granted marketing authorisation in July 2026 for those aged 4 to 60. The Economic Times reports that Takeda, which it describes as a $28 billion company, will lend its global vaccines research expertise to Dr Reddy's healthcare network and commercial reach in India. The price for India was not disclosed; Qdenga is priced at over $200 for two doses in a few European countries and at $80 for the full course in markets such as Indonesia. Inclusion in India's public immunisation programme remains, in the companies' words, an important long-term ambition. Reported dengue cases in India have surged eleven-fold over the past two decades, and a study by the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory of the Indian Council of Medical Research found all four dengue virus serotypes co-circulating across multiple regions, with one in 14 patients infected with multiple serotypes concurrently. Separately, the Drugs Consultative Committee will consider a proposal, referred to it by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board at a meeting in August, to bring all sterile drug products including small volume parenterals under the Central Licensing Approving Authority scheme; at present only large-volume parenterals, sera and vaccines, recombinant DNA-derived products, cell or stem-cell-derived products, gene therapeutic products and xenografts are centrally licensed. The proposal cites about 240 injection samples found not of standard quality in 2025-26, a metoprolol injection contaminated with Burkholderia cepacia and an adenosine batch with Gram-negative contamination. It comes days after the Supreme Court declined to interfere with a Himachal Pradesh High Court ruling that enforcement powers under Chapter IV of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act rest essentially with State authorities. The DTAB has separately recommended extending prior intimation, in place of prior permission, to bioavailability and bioequivalence studies for domestic approvals, and the processing time for import licences for new drugs and reference products meant for analytical and non-clinical testing is to be halved from 90 to 45 working days, with formal licensing retained for high-risk categories.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Dengue cases rise eleven-fold and all four serotypes co-circulate → CDSCO clears Qdenga for ages 4-60 in July 2026 → a foreign innovator ties up with a domestic distributor for reach → the same regulator faces sterile-injectable contamination and an HC ruling on State powers → it proposes to centralise sterile licensing while easing BA-BE and import approvals

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Dengue's four serotypes are the reason a vaccine is hard —** Dengue is caused by four antigenically distinct serotypes of a flavivirus transmitted by Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus. Infection with one serotype confers lasting immunity to that serotype only, and partial, temporary cross-immunity to the others. Antibody-dependent enhancement means that a second infection with a different serotype can be more severe than the first, which is why a dengue vaccine must protect against all four serotypes simultaneously and why serostatus has dominated the safety debate around dengue vaccines worldwide. 2. **Marketing authorisation is not inclusion in the immunisation programme —** A CDSCO marketing authorisation permits sale in the private market on prescription. Inclusion in the Universal Immunisation Programme is a separate decision taken by the Union government on the advice of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, and it turns on disease burden, cost-effectiveness, supply security and programme feasibility rather than on regulatory approval alone. Candidates routinely collapse the two; the distinction is exactly what makes this story examinable. 3. **The Central Licensing Approving Authority scheme is the existing exception to State licensing —** Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act the default is that manufacturing and sale licences are issued by State licensing authorities. For specified high-risk categories the Drugs Rules make the Drugs Controller General of India the Central Licence Approving Authority, so that a single central standard applies. Vaccines, sera, large-volume parenterals, recombinant DNA products, cell and gene therapy products and xenografts are already in that list. The present proposal would extend it to every sterile product, which is a significant shift of the Centre-State boundary by rule rather than by amendment. 4. **Bioequivalence is what makes a generic a generic —** A generic medicine contains the same active ingredient in the same dosage form as the innovator product. Bioavailability studies measure the rate and extent to which the active ingredient reaches the systemic circulation, and bioequivalence studies demonstrate that the generic behaves in the body in a manner statistically indistinguishable from the reference product. Because the generic is not required to repeat efficacy trials, the bioequivalence study is the entire evidentiary basis for approval, which is why the conditions under which it may be started matter.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Vector-borne disease is a standing GS2 and GS3 crossover —** Dengue sits at the junction of health-service delivery, urbanisation and climate. The syllabus wording on 'issues relating to development and management of social sector/services relating to health' and on 'science and technology developments and their applications' both cover it, and a vaccine story lets a candidate write about both the biology and the delivery system in one answer. 2. **Regulatory 'ease of doing business' versus patient safety is the sharper theme —** UPSC has moved from asking about the pharmaceutical industry's size to asking about the quality of its regulation. Two proposals moving through the same committee in the same month — one tightening licensing, one loosening approvals — is an unusually

	clean illustration of a regulator balancing two mandates, and it invites the kind of both-sides argument the examiner rewards. 3. **Centre-State division of regulatory power keeps returning —** The Supreme Court declining to disturb a High Court holding that Chapter IV enforcement rests with the States, at the very moment the Centre proposes to widen central licensing, is a federalism question inside a health story. Health and public health are State subjects in the State List while drugs and poisons appear in the Concurrent List, and that asymmetry is where the answer must start.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Dengue is caused by four serotypes of a flavivirus transmitted principally by Aedes aegypti; infection with one serotype confers lifelong immunity only to that serotype. • Qdenga is Takeda's dengue vaccine; it received marketing authorisation from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation in July 2026 for the age group 4 to 60 years. • Under the Seventh Schedule, 'public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries' is Entry 6 of the State List, while 'drugs and poisons' is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List. • Under the Drugs Rules, the Drugs Controller General of India acts as Central Licence Approving Authority for specified categories including vaccines, sera, large-volume parenterals, recombinant DNA-derived products, cell and gene therapy products and xenografts; other products are licensed by State licensing authorities. • Bioavailability and bioequivalence studies are the evidentiary basis for approval of a generic drug and demonstrate that it behaves in the body in the same way as the reference product. • The New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 govern, among other things, the import of new or investigational drugs for clinical trials, bioavailability and bioequivalence studies, and tests or analysis; Rules 67 to 70 deal with such imports. • The Drugs Consultative Committee, constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, advises on securing uniformity throughout India in the administration of the Act; proposals to amend the Drugs Rules, 1945, such as the labelling rule for cough syrups, are placed before it.
ANALYSIS	1. **A private-market launch is an access decision disguised as a commercial one —** Qdenga will enter India through private paediatric and adult vaccination, not through the Universal Immunisation Programme, and the companies concede that public-programme inclusion is a long-term ambition. Since dengue's burden falls heavily on dense urban settlements where out-of-pocket vaccine spending is least likely, a private-first launch will reach the population with the lowest marginal benefit first. That is not a criticism of the companies, who have no route into a public programme they cannot enter unilaterally; it is a statement about what the launch will and will not achieve epidemiologically. 2. **The price bracket tells you the negotiation that is coming —** Over $200 for two doses in some European markets and $80 for the full course in Indonesia is a very wide band, and the Indian price was deliberately not disclosed. Tiered pricing by paying power is standard for vaccines, and the Indonesian figure is the more relevant comparator. The real determinant of India's price will be whether the government signals a credible intention to procure at volume, because a large public order is the only thing that moves an innovator to the bottom of its tiered band.

	3. **A vaccine does not retire vector control, and treating it as though it does would be the costly error —** All four serotypes co-circulating, with one in 14 patients carrying more than one concurrently, describes hyperendemic transmission. A vaccine reduces severe disease in the vaccinated; it does not reduce the mosquito population, and a vaccinated population living with the same Aedes density will continue to generate outbreaks among the unvaccinated. Municipal source reduction, surveillance and larval control remain the load-bearing interventions, and an answer that treats the vaccine as the solution has misread the epidemiology. 4. **The two regulatory proposals pull in opposite directions and both are defensible —** Bringing every sterile product under central licensing tightens control over a class where contamination kills — 240 injection samples not of standard quality in a single year, and named contamination incidents, are a real evidentiary basis. Letting firms begin bioequivalence studies on intimation rather than permission loosens control over a class where the risk to trial subjects is comparatively low and the cost of delay is months of blocked generic entry. Read together they are not inconsistent; they are risk-proportionate regulation, which is the correct principle. The question is whether the same regulator has the inspection capacity to carry the new centralised load it is taking on. 5. **The federalism problem is being solved by rule-making rather than by argument —** The Supreme Court has just left standing a ruling that Chapter IV enforcement powers rest essentially with State authorities. The proposal to widen the Central Licensing Approving Authority scheme does not contest that; it moves the licensing of an entire class of products to the Centre through the Drugs Rules, which shrinks the field in which the State's enforcement power operates. It is an elegant route around a jurisdictional holding, and States with functioning drug administrations may reasonably object that variation in inspection quality is an argument for capacity-building, not for centralisation. 6. **Intimation-based approval shifts the burden from before to after, and only works if 'after' exists —** Replacing prior permission with prior intimation is a genuine efficiency gain only if the regulator actually audits a meaningful fraction of intimated studies afterwards. Where post-facto scrutiny is weak, intimation becomes de facto self-certification, and the bioequivalence study — the sole evidentiary basis for a generic approval — becomes the least supervised step in the process. The reform therefore needs a published audit rate to be credible; without one, the level playing field it invokes is level in the wrong direction.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Risk-proportionate regulation, not uniform stringency, is the correct organising principle for a pharmaceutical regulator." Discuss with reference to recent proposals of India's drug regulatory bodies, and examine the Centre-State implications of expanding central licensing. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the regulator's twin mandate in one sentence — assuring quality and safety, and not obstructing access and affordability — and note that the Drugs Technical Advisory Board and Drugs Consultative Committee are the statutory forums where the two are reconciled. 2. **Body — set the two proposals side by side —** Tightening: all sterile products including small volume parenterals moved under central licensing, justified by contamination risk and by 240 injection samples found not of standard quality in 2025-26. Loosening: prior intimation replacing prior permission for domestic bioavailability and bioequivalence studies, and import-licence processing halved from 90 to 45 working days, with high-risk categories excluded. Show that the exclusion of high-risk categories is what makes the pair coherent.

	3. **Body — the federalism analysis —** Public health and hospitals are in the State List; drugs and poisons are in the Concurrent List. The Himachal Pradesh High Court holding, left undisturbed by the Supreme Court, places Chapter IV enforcement with the States. Argue that expanding the Central Licensing Approving Authority scheme narrows the field of State enforcement without confronting the holding, and set out the case on both sides — uniformity and inspection quality against State capacity and proximity. 4. **Body — the condition on which the reform succeeds —** Capacity. Centralising licensing without expanding the central inspectorate transfers a workload rather than a standard; intimation-based approval without a published post-facto audit rate is self-certification. Make capacity, not intention, the test. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that risk proportionality is right in principle and that its legitimacy depends on transparency — published audit rates, published sampling and failure data, and a clear statement of which categories sit in which risk tier. A regulator that publishes how often it checks earns the discretion it is asking for.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Health Secretary of a State with high dengue incidence. A newly approved dengue vaccine is available in the private market at a price most of your population cannot afford. Your Minister asks whether the State should buy it. What is your advice?** ***Approach:*** Advise against a State purchase decision taken on the basis of the approval alone, and say why in terms the Minister can defend publicly. Ask for three things first: district-level serotype and hospitalisation data so that the burden being addressed is measured rather than assumed, a costing that compares the vaccine against the same money spent on vector control and fever surveillance, and a price quotation obtained through a volume tender rather than the private list price. If the vaccine is bought, recommend starting with the highest-burden districts and the age groups with the highest severe-disease rate, because a thin State-wide distribution will neither protect anyone nor produce evidence. And insist that the vector-control budget is not reduced to fund it, since the vaccine does not lower transmission. **Q2. As Drugs Controller of a State, you learn that under a new central rule the sterile injectable units you have licensed and inspected for years will now be licensed centrally. Your inspectors feel displaced. How do you manage this?** ***Approach:*** Separate the institutional grievance from the public interest and be honest with the staff about both. The rule change removes a licensing function, not the enforcement function — sale, distribution and stocking within the State remain yours under Chapter IV, and inspection of premises in your territory continues, so tell the inspectorate exactly what it retains rather than letting rumour define it. Offer the central authority your inspection history and non-standard-quality data for those units, because a central licence granted without the State's field knowledge is worse for patients than the arrangement it replaces. Where you believe your State's record justifies retaining the function, put that on the record in writing through the Drugs Consultative Committee, which exists precisely for this. Resistance through the proper forum is legitimate; resistance through non-cooperation is not. **Q3. A generic manufacturer in your jurisdiction begins a bioequivalence study on intimation under the new system. A trial participant is hospitalised. The firm says it had no obligation to seek permission. Is it right, and what do you do?** ***Approach:*** It is right about permission and wrong about obligation. Prior intimation removes the waiting period for clearance; it does not dilute the requirements of ethics committee approval, informed consent, reporting of serious adverse events within the prescribed timelines and compensation where the injury is trial-related. Verify those

four things immediately and in that order, and ensure the participant's medical management is being paid for by the sponsor while the causality assessment is pending, not after it. Report the event upward at once, because a serious adverse event in the first cohort of studies conducted under a liberalised route is information the regulator needs before the route is extended further. The reform's credibility rests on cases like this being handled visibly and strictly.

6.3 Two Caesarean Deaths in Bundi Take Rajasthan to Nineteen Maternal Deaths in Three Months

THE NEWS Two women who underwent caesarean sections at the District Women's Hospital in Bundi, Rajasthan, died at separate private hospitals in Kota earlier this week. Kavita Kumawat, 32, of Tonk and Varsha Sain, 28, of Bundi were admitted on September 15 and underwent surgery; when their condition began deteriorating shortly afterwards they were referred to the Government Medical College in Kota, 40 km away, and were then shifted to separate private hospitals in Kota, where they died during treatment the following day. The children delivered by surgery are reported to be in good health. The Medical and Health Department has temporarily sealed the operating theatre at the Bundi hospital and launched infection-control measures along with sampling and culture testing. Bundi Collector Harphool Singh Yadav has sought a report from the department. A three-member inquiry committee headed by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and comprising the Chief Medical and Health Officer and the Head of the Gynaecology Department has been appointed in Bundi. A departmental spokesperson said on Friday that a woman gynaecologist at the District Women's Hospital had been relieved of duty, even as ten women with high-risk pregnancies were admitted to the hospital. The next of kin of the deceased have demanded an impartial investigation, action against those responsible and ₹50 lakh each in compensation. The deaths follow a series of fatal complications after caesarean deliveries at government hospitals across Rajasthan in recent months. Five women died after caesarean deliveries at government hospitals in Kota in May; eight women fell ill after caesarean sections at a government hospital in Jodhpur in June, where officials inspected the hospital pharmacy; and maternal deaths were reported from government hospitals in Bhilwara, Banswara and Bikaner in July. The Hindu reports that investigations could not establish a common cause for all the deaths, although infection, patient monitoring and other procedural lapses were probed. The total number of maternal deaths in the State between May and the end of July stood at 19. The State government subsequently announced measures including an intensive pregnancy-screening drive.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Institutional delivery rises and caesarean volumes rise with it → district hospitals perform more surgery than their infection control and monitoring capacity supports → clusters of post-caesarean deaths appear across districts → each is investigated separately and no common cause is established → a theatre is sealed and a doctor is relieved of duty → the system-level defect remains unnamed

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The maternal mortality ratio is a ratio, not a rate, and the distinction is asked —** The maternal mortality ratio is the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births. A maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes. In India the figure is estimated by the Sample Registration System of the Office of the Registrar General of India. Sustainable Development Goal target 3.1 is to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per one lakh live births by 2030.

2. **Direct obstetric causes are few and mostly preventable —** The major direct causes of maternal death are haemorrhage, sepsis, hypertensive disorders including eclampsia, obstructed labour and unsafe abortion, with anaemia as the dominant indirect contributor in India. Post-caesarean deaths point most strongly towards sepsis and haemorrhage, which is why sealing an operating theatre, taking environmental and equipment samples and running culture tests is the standard first response. It is also why the quality of the drugs and fluids used in the theatre becomes a line of inquiry, as the pharmacy inspection at Jodhpur indicates.

	3. **The scheme architecture rewards institutional delivery —** The Janani Suraksha Yojana, launched in 2005 under the National Rural Health Mission, is a conditional cash transfer to promote institutional delivery. The Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram of 2011 entitles pregnant women to free delivery including caesarean section, free drugs, diagnostics, diet, blood and transport in public health institutions. Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan provides fixed-day antenatal care, and LaQshya targets quality improvement in labour rooms and maternity operation theatres. The design has succeeded in moving deliveries into institutions; the corresponding question is whether the institutions were upgraded at the same pace. 4. **Maternal Death Surveillance and Response is the mechanism this case is testing —** Under the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response framework every maternal death is to be notified, reviewed at the facility and at the district level under the District Collector, and acted upon, with the review explicitly non-punitive so that clinicians report honestly. The purpose is to identify system failures rather than individual culprits. When the visible response to a cluster is the relieving of a doctor from duty while no common cause is established, the surveillance system's central premise is under strain.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Maternal health is the most reliably examined health topic in GS2 —** The syllabus head on 'issues relating to development and management of social sector/services relating to health' and the head on welfare schemes for vulnerable sections both cover it, and the paper has repeatedly asked candidates to move beyond coverage figures to quality of care. A cluster of deaths inside a well-covered public system is exactly the evidence that question wants. 2. **Quality of care is the current frame, replacing access —** The earlier examination frame was access — institutional delivery rates, coverage of antenatal care, cash transfers. The frame has shifted to what happens after access: infection control, referral chains, human resources and monitoring. A candidate who writes only about scheme coverage is answering the previous decade's question. 3. **The referral chain is an examinable object in its own right —** Two women deteriorating at a district hospital, referred 40 km to a medical college, and then shifted again to private hospitals where they died, is a textbook illustration of what a first referral unit is supposed to prevent. Questions on health infrastructure reward candidates who can describe the sub-centre to district hospital ladder and say precisely where it broke.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The maternal mortality ratio is the number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births, and is estimated in India by the Sample Registration System of the Office of the Registrar General of India. • A maternal death is defined as the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, excluding accidental or incidental causes. • Sustainable Development Goal target 3.1 seeks to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per one lakh live births by 2030. • The Janani Suraksha Yojana, launched in 2005 under the National Rural Health Mission, is a conditional cash transfer scheme promoting institutional delivery; the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, 2011, entitles pregnant women to free delivery, drugs, diagnostics, diet, blood and transport in public health institutions. • Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan provides fixed-day assured antenatal care, and LaQshya is the initiative for quality improvement in labour

	rooms and maternity operation theatres. ● Under the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response framework, maternal deaths are notified and reviewed at facility and district level, and the review is intended to be non-punitive and system-focused. ● Article 42 of the Constitution directs the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief, and is a Directive Principle of State Policy.
ANALYSIS	1. **A cluster with no common cause is itself the finding —** Kota in May, Jodhpur in June, Bhilwara, Banswara and Bikaner in July, Bundi in September — and investigations that could not establish a common cause across them. The instinct is to read that as inconclusive. The better reading is that the absence of a single cause across six districts points to a system-level defect rather than six coincidences: infection control practice, theatre sterilisation, post-operative monitoring and possibly the quality of consumables are common to all of them, and are precisely the variables that a facility-by-facility inquiry is least likely to isolate. A State-level clinical audit across all six is the investigation that has not been ordered. 2. **Relieving a gynaecologist of duty is a response to public anger, not to the evidence —** No common cause has been established, and a woman gynaecologist has been relieved of duty while ten high-risk pregnancies remain admitted at the same hospital. If the cause is environmental or procedural, removing a surgeon subtracts capacity from a facility already short of it without removing the hazard. If it is individual negligence, the inquiry must establish that first. There is also a longer cost: the Maternal Death Surveillance and Response framework depends on clinicians reporting deaths candidly, and a visible pattern of punitive response to unexplained deaths teaches the opposite behaviour to every obstetrician watching. 3. **The referral chain failed twice and only the first failure is being examined —** Both women deteriorated at a district hospital, were sent 40 km to a government medical college, and then moved again to private hospitals in Kota, where they died. The second transfer is the more revealing one, because it suggests either that the medical college could not take them or that the families had lost confidence in the public facility. The inquiry into the Bundi operating theatre will not answer that question, and it is the question that decides whether upgrading Bundi would have saved these two women. 4. **Institutional delivery was the right policy and it created this vulnerability —** Moving births from homes to institutions is among the most consequential public health achievements of the past two decades and it has saved a very large number of lives. But it concentrates risk: a home delivery that goes wrong kills one woman, while a contaminated theatre or an unmonitored ward kills in clusters. Concentrating births in institutions therefore raises, not lowers, the required standard of infection control and monitoring, and where the institutional upgrade has not kept pace with the volume shift, the same policy that reduced deaths produces clusters like this one. That is an argument for investment, not for retreat, and it should be stated in exactly that order. 5. **The compensation demand is doing work that a system should be doing —** The families have asked for ₹50 lakh each. Ex gratia payments in such cases are typically discretionary, negotiated under public pressure and unrelated to any finding of fault, which means the amount tracks the volume of protest rather than the harm or the culpability. A no-fault compensation scheme for maternal deaths in public facilities, with a fixed schedule and an independent determination, would give families certainty, remove the incentive to escalate, and — because payouts would be counted — give the State a running financial measure of its own clinical failures.

	6. **The drug-quality line of inquiry deserves more weight than it is getting —** Officials inspected the pharmacy of the Jodhpur hospital where eight women fell ill after caesarean sections, and 240 injection samples were found not of standard quality nationally in 2025-26. Substandard or contaminated intravenous fluids, oxytocics and antibiotics would produce exactly this signature: clusters in different districts, no common procedural cause, and onset shortly after surgery. Batch-level tracing of consumables across all the affected facilities is cheap relative to what has already been spent on inquiries, and no report so far indicates it has been done.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India has succeeded in moving childbirth into institutions but has not correspondingly assured the quality of care within them. Examine this proposition with reference to recent clusters of post-caesarean maternal deaths in public hospitals, and suggest a framework for accountability. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the achievement precisely and without flattery — the maternal mortality ratio has fallen substantially and institutional delivery has risen sharply under Janani Suraksha Yojana and Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram — and then state the proposition the question asks you to test, that the quality of institutional care has not risen in step. 2. **Body — evidence of the quality gap —** Use the Rajasthan sequence as a single piece of evidence: deaths after caesarean sections at government hospitals in Kota, Jodhpur, Bhilwara, Banswara, Bikaner and Bundi, 19 maternal deaths between May and July, and investigations that could not establish a common cause. Then name the specific system variables that a cluster of this shape implicates — theatre sterilisation and infection control, post-operative monitoring, quality of consumables, and the referral chain. 3. **Body — why accountability currently fails —** Argue that the existing response is individual and punitive while the defect is systemic, and that this is in direct tension with the non-punitive design of Maternal Death Surveillance and Response. Note that suspending a clinician suppresses reporting, which is the input the whole surveillance system runs on. 4. **Body — the framework you propose —** Four concrete elements: mandatory facility-level clinical audit of every maternal death with published aggregated findings; accreditation of maternity operation theatres against LaQshya standards with the accreditation status displayed publicly at the facility; batch-level traceability of drugs and consumables used in labour rooms and theatres; and a no-fault compensation schedule that removes the need for families to protest for redress. 5. **Conclusion —** Close on the standard the State has effectively promised. Once the government has persuaded a woman to deliver in a public institution rather than at home, it has assumed responsibility for the conditions inside that institution, and that assumed responsibility — not the cash transfer — is now the measure of the programme.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Collector of a district where two women have died after caesarean sections at the district women's hospital. A crowd has gathered outside the hospital and ten high-risk pregnancies are currently admitted there. What are your first decisions?** ***Approach:*** Deal with the ten women before you deal with the crowd, because they are the population still at risk. Get an independent obstetrician and an infection-control nurse from the medical college to the hospital within hours to review every admitted case and decide who must be shifted, and arrange transport before announcing anything, so that the announcement is accompanied by an act. Seal and sample the

theatre, and simultaneously impound and seal the batch stock of intravenous fluids, oxytocics and antibiotics used in the two surgeries, since that evidence degrades and disappears fastest. Then meet the families and the crowd yourself, state what has been done and what is not yet known, and give a date for the inquiry report. Do not promise a finding; promise a timeline and keep it.

Q2. Your Chief Medical and Health Officer proposes suspending the operating surgeon immediately to calm public anger, before the inquiry has reported. What is your position?

Approach: Decline, and record the reasons on the file so that the decision is defensible later. Where no cause has been established, suspension is a public-relations act with a clinical cost — the facility loses a surgeon while the hazard, if environmental or procedural, remains in place. Offer the alternative that actually protects patients: relieve the surgeon of elective operating while the inquiry runs, bring in a replacement from the medical college so capacity does not fall, and complete the inquiry within a fixed short period. Explain to the CMHO that maternal death review is designed to be non-punitive because it depends on doctors reporting deaths honestly, and that a suspension before findings will cost us candour in every future case in this district.

Q3. The families demand ₹50 lakh each in compensation. You have no sanction for that amount and the inquiry has not reported. What do you tell them?

Approach: Tell them the truth about what you can and cannot do, immediately and in person, because the worst outcome is a family that learns the limits of your authority from someone else. Say plainly that you cannot sanction ₹50 lakh, that the amount is fixed above your level, and that you will forward their representation with your own recommendation. Then do what is within your power at once — the immediate relief available under existing State norms, the post-mortem and inquiry reports given to them in writing, and the newborns' care assured, since two infants have survived and their needs are a present obligation rather than a future negotiation. Give them a named officer and a date. Families escalate when they cannot tell whether anything is moving; they escalate less when they can see exactly what has been sent, to whom, and when the answer is due.

7. Science & Technology

Three stories about the same unfinished transition: from assembling what others design to owning what others must license. A minister declares India already globally competitive in chips on the strength of five packaging plants; a deep-tech op-ed shows the patent pipeline behind that claim and where it frays; and the Supreme Court, looking at the National Testing Agency, asks the awkward companion question — whether a country that cannot run an examination securely can be trusted to run a technology mission. Capability and institutional integrity are not separate files.

7.1 Vaishnaw Declares India "Already Globally Competitive" in Chips on Five Packaging Plants

THE NEWS Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday that India has already hit global benchmarks in the semiconductor sector, with products developed and exported from the country meeting world standards in quality and cost. "We are already globally competitive," he said. "The production that has started at all five plants is meeting the standards for export competition, both in terms of quality and cost. So, we are globally competitive, and it is a very good journey. Semicon 1.0 was all about laying the foundation, while Semicon 2.0 is about building on that foundation." Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the annual Semicon India Summit 2026 in the capital, Vaishnaw said the growth of the ecosystem has given the government confidence that more than 100,000 new jobs will easily be created in the semiconductor industry in the near future, and that the five chip packaging facilities now live have encouraged other global investors. Five of the 12 projects sanctioned under the first phase of the ₹76,000 crore India Semiconductor Mission are operational; the assembly, testing, marking and packaging units of Micron Technology, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi began commercial production earlier this year. ISM 1.0 was launched in December 2021 and operationalised a year later. Vaishnaw had said on Thursday that the government has seen investment interest of about $11-12 billion from companies under ISM 2.0, notified a few weeks ago. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, inaugurating the fifth Semicon India Summit, said India's success in semiconductors will strengthen global supply chains at a time when the world is looking for new and trusted manufacturing destinations amid the weaponisation of these links, and launched commercial production at Suchi Semicon's ₹868 crore unit near Surat and CDIL's expanded facility in Mohali. The summit saw 23 MoUs signed. Applied Materials will invest about $5 billion over ten years in a 140-acre Advanced Semiconductor Research Park in Bengaluru; its Semiconductor Products Group president Prabu Raja said the end-to-end model exists only at Santa Clara and is being taken outside the United States for the first time. Japan's Fujifilm is investing about ₹800 crore in phases at the Dholera Special Investment Region and has signed a strategic MoU with Tata Electronics. More than 300 foreign companies from about 30 countries are participating.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Chip supply shocks and export controls turn semiconductors into a security question → India launches ISM in December 2021 with ₹76,000 crore → capital-light packaging plants come up first → five go live and equipment and materials firms follow → the minister reads assembly capability as global competitiveness, while advanced packaging and fabrication are still absent

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **The India Semiconductor Mission is a division, not a ministry —** The India Semiconductor Mission was set up as an independent business division within the Digital India Corporation under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, with an advisory board of industry and academic experts. It administers the Semicon India programme, whose approved outlay at launch was ₹76,000 crore. Its instruments are fiscal support for fabs, display fabs, compound semiconductor and ATMP or OSAT units, and the Design Linked Incentive scheme for chip design. Candidates who describe it as a ministry or a statutory authority lose the mark; it is an executive mission structure. 2. **A fab and an ATMP unit are different industries wearing the same name —** Fabrication turns a blank silicon wafer into patterned dies through photolithography, etching and deposition, needs extreme ultraviolet or deep ultraviolet tools, ultrapure water and a capital outlay in billions of dollars. Assembly, testing, marking and packaging takes finished dies, mounts them, wires them and encases them, at perhaps a tenth of the capital intensity and a fraction of the technological difficulty. Outsourced

	semiconductor assembly and test, or OSAT, is the contract version of the same activity. All five operational Indian units are on the packaging side of that line. 3. **Advanced packaging is where the frontier has moved —** As transistor scaling slows, performance gains increasingly come from heterogeneous integration — stacking logic and memory dies, using silicon interposers and chiplets, and moving from wafer-level to panel-level packaging. This is the segment Prabu Raja described when he spoke of wafers going to panels and silicon possibly going to glass. The Economic Times reports that the three existing chip packaging units in India are not in heterogeneous integration or advanced packaging, which places them in the older, commoditised tier of the same business. 4. **Why equipment and materials matter more than the fab count —** The semiconductor value chain runs from electronic design automation software and intellectual property cores, through equipment and ultrapure chemicals and gases, to fabrication, packaging and testing. Chokepoints sit in equipment and materials, which are concentrated in a handful of firms in the United States, the Netherlands, Japan and South Korea. An Applied Materials research park and a Fujifilm materials plant therefore address a structurally deeper dependency than another assembly line does.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The syllabus wording is explicit —** GS3 carries 'Science and Technology — developments and their applications and effects in everyday life' and 'achievements of Indians in science and technology; indigenisation of technology and developing new technology'. Semiconductor policy is the cleanest live example of indigenisation, and it also sits in GS3's infrastructure and investment models territory because the mission is essentially a subsidy design question. 2. **UPSC asks about the chain, not the chip —** The examiner has repeatedly set questions on critical mineral and technology supply chains, on import dependence, and on the difficulty of moving from assembly to design. A candidate who can distinguish fabrication from packaging, and name where the chokepoints actually are, answers a whole family of such questions from one preparation. 3. **Weaponisation of supply chains is now standard framing —** The Prime Minister's own words at the summit — trusted manufacturing destinations amid the weaponisation of key links — are the vocabulary of economic security. The same framing serves answers on China plus one, on export controls, on friend-shoring and on strategic autonomy in technology.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The India Semiconductor Mission operates as an independent business division within the Digital India Corporation under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, with an approved outlay of ₹76,000 crore at launch. • ISM 1.0 was launched in December 2021 and operationalised a year later; the Semicon India Summit held in 2026 was the fifth edition. • ATMP stands for assembly, testing, marking and packaging; OSAT stands for outsourced semiconductor assembly and test. Neither involves fabricating wafers. • The Design Linked Incentive scheme supports integrated circuit design and intellectual property core development, and is distinct from the capital support offered to fabrication and packaging units. • Gallium nitride and silicon carbide are wide-bandgap compound semiconductors used in radar, power electronics and electric-vehicle chargers, and are covered by the compound semiconductor component of the Semicon India programme. • The Dholera Special Investment Region in Gujarat is being developed under the

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor framework and hosts semiconductor fabrication and materials investment.

- Heterogeneous integration refers to packaging multiple dies, such as logic and memory, into a single device, and is the technology segment in which India's operating packaging units do not yet work.

ANALYSIS

1. **Competitiveness in packaging is not competitiveness in semiconductors —** The minister's claim is defensible on its own terms and misleading as a headline. Five plants producing packaged devices that meet export standards on quality and cost is a genuine achievement, because yield and reliability in packaging are not trivial. But packaging is the lowest-margin, most contestable segment of the chain, the one Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines have occupied for decades. Declaring global competitiveness on that basis risks the same category error India made with electronics assembly, where a large export number concealed a thin domestic value addition. The honest formulation is that India has become competitive in one segment and has not yet entered the others.

2. **The jobs figure is the weakest number in the story —** More than 100,000 new jobs is offered without a base year, a definition of direct versus indirect employment, or a source. Semiconductor manufacturing is notoriously capital-intensive and labour-light; a modern fab employs a few thousand people against billions of dollars of capital. Packaging is more labour-absorbing, which is precisely why the claim is plausible only if it rests on the segment the minister is otherwise trying to grow beyond. An answer should use the sanctioned outlay and the investment interest figures, which are official, and treat the employment claim as an assertion.

3. **The Applied Materials commitment is more significant than any fab announcement —** A $5 billion research park that takes an end-to-end innovate-design-prototype-supply-support model outside Santa Clara for the first time, with a stated intent to grow Indian supplier count tenfold by 2035, addresses the part of the chain where denial hurts most. Equipment is the chokepoint through which export controls are actually enforced. If even a fraction of that vendor base materialises, India acquires leverage that a subsidised fab does not confer, because a fab can be starved of tools while a tool ecosystem cannot easily be starved of customers.

4. **ISM 2.0 broadening beyond fabs is the correct policy correction —** Raja's remark that it is good to see funding diversified beyond fabrication plants and OSAT units is a polite way of saying the first phase was too narrow. Subsidising fabs alone produces expensive islands dependent on imported equipment, chemicals and gases. Extending incentives to equipment manufacturing, materials and the supplier base is how Taiwan and South Korea actually built depth. The $11-12 billion of stated investment interest is an expression of intent, not committed capital, and the distinction should be preserved in any answer.

5. **The subsidy question nobody at the summit asked —** Every major jurisdiction is now bidding for the same plants, which means capital is being allocated by comparative fiscal generosity rather than comparative advantage. The counter-view deserves a fair hearing: if chips are a strategic good whose denial can halt defence and automotive production, paying above market for domestic capacity is insurance, not waste. But insurance has a premium, and the premium here is public money that competes with research funding, power subsidies for the grid the fabs will draw on, and the water that ultrapure processes consume. Naming that trade-off is what distinguishes analysis from the press release.

6. **Twenty-three MoUs is a metric of interest, not of construction —** A memorandum of understanding creates no enforceable obligation and no financial closure. The useful distinction for an answer is between sanctioned projects, projects that have achieved

	financial closure, projects under construction and projects in commercial production. On the papers' own account, 12 projects were sanctioned under ISM 1.0 and five are operational — a conversion rate worth stating plainly, because it is the single most informative number in the story and it is not the one in the headline.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's semiconductor mission has succeeded in attracting assembly and packaging capacity but has yet to secure the segments of the value chain where strategic vulnerability actually lies." Critically examine in the light of recent policy initiatives and investment announcements. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the value chain, not the announcement. One sentence naming the segments — design and intellectual property, equipment, materials, fabrication, packaging and testing — and one sentence stating that India's operational capacity as of the fifth Semicon India Summit lies in the last of these. That framing earns the marks that a chronology of schemes never will. 2. **Body — establish what has been achieved, with numbers —** ₹76,000 crore sanctioned under ISM 1.0 from December 2021, 12 projects sanctioned and five operational, packaging units of Micron, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi in commercial production, Suchi Semicon near Surat at ₹868 crore and CDIL at Mohali launched, and about $11-12 billion of investment interest under ISM 2.0. Concede the achievement without qualification; an answer that cannot acknowledge progress reads as reflexive. 3. **Body — locate the vulnerability precisely —** Explain that packaging is capital-light and widely contested, that the operating units are not in advanced packaging or heterogeneous integration, and that denial risk sits in equipment, electronic design automation software and ultrapure materials. Use the Applied Materials research park and the Fujifilm materials plant at Dholera as evidence that policy has begun to recognise this, and note that ISM 2.0's broader eligibility is the correction. 4. **Body — argue the cost side honestly —** Set out the subsidy-versus-comparative-advantage tension, the water and power intensity of fabrication, and the opportunity cost against research funding. Then give the counter-argument its due: for a strategic input, insurance against denial can justify a premium. Examiners reward the candidate who states both and then takes a position. 5. **Conclusion —** Close on the conversion metric. The test of the mission is not MoUs signed or jobs projected but how many sanctioned projects reach commercial production and how much of the equipment and materials feeding them is domestically supplied. Recommend that the mission publish that conversion data, because a subsidy programme whose outputs are not publicly measurable cannot be evaluated by Parliament.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the district collector of a district hosting an approved semiconductor unit. The plant needs assured ultrapure water and uninterrupted power in a district where farmers already contest groundwater allocation. How do you proceed?** ***Approach:*** Get the numbers before the meeting, not after: the plant's daily water draw, its recycling and zero-liquid-discharge commitments, the aquifer's assessed status and the existing irrigation allocation. Insist that the unit's water be sourced and priced transparently, with recycled-water targets written into the allotment conditions rather than left to a corporate sustainability report. Convene the farmers' representatives early, show them the actual figures including how small or large the industrial draw is against agricultural use, and do not promise that there will be no trade-off if there will be one. The failure mode in every such project is a collector who suppresses the conflict until construction is complete and then faces an agitation with no credibility left to spend.

Q2. As a Secretary evaluating a request for enhanced fiscal support from a sanctioned unit that has not started construction two years after approval, what is your test?

Approach: Apply a milestone test rather than a sentiment test. Establish what the applicant has actually done — land possession, financial closure, technology partner agreement, equipment orders placed — and distinguish delay caused by external shocks such as equipment lead times from delay caused by an unfunded promoter. Enhanced support for a project that has achieved financial closure and is held up by supply chains is defensible; enhanced support that substitutes for equity the promoter never brought converts an incentive into a bailout and invites every other applicant to under-capitalise. Record the reasoning in the file, because these decisions are audited years later by people who will not remember the market conditions.

Q3. A minister asks you to draft a public statement claiming that India is globally competitive in semiconductors. You believe the claim is true only for packaging. What do you do?

Approach: Draft the statement so that it is precise and still positive: name the segment, state the plants and the export-standard achievement, and let the accuracy do the persuading. Put the qualification in the note to the minister, in writing, explaining exactly which segments the claim does not cover and what a well-informed critic will say within a day. A civil servant's duty is to ensure the political executive is never surprised by a fact it could have been told. If the minister chooses the broader formulation anyway, that is a political judgement he is entitled to make and you have discharged your obligation; what you may not do is let the claim go out without the record showing you set out the limits.

7.2 Should the Anti-Paper-Leak Act Cover JEE Advanced? Supreme Court Seeks NTA Reform Report

THE NEWS The Economic Times reports that discussions have begun on bringing examinations such as JEE Advanced and JAM, run by autonomous institutes like the IITs, within the ambit of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026. At present JEE Advanced, GATE, JAM and CEED are under the jurisdiction of the IITs and the Indian Institute of Science. While inclusion is considered desirable for creating higher deterrence, the implications for the autonomy of institutes of national importance and for the sanctity of the examinations they conduct have led to much discussion within the IIT-IISc community, with some quarters concerned about the long-term effects on students' careers, especially as penalties have become stricter following the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and cancellation. Under the amended Act, a person or student caught indulging in unfair means in any examination may now face imprisonment of five to ten years and a penalty of up to ₹50 lakh. The Act covers six categories — examinations of the Union Public Service Commission, the National Testing Agency, the Staff Selection Commission, the Railway Recruitment Boards, the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection, and central ministries or departments with their attached and subordinate offices — plus any other authority the Centre may notify. JEE Main, conducted by the NTA, is automatically covered; JEE Advanced, which determines IIT admissions and is conducted by the IITs on a rotational basis under the guidance of the Joint Admission Board, is not. Separately, a Supreme Court bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe, hearing petitions on the integrity of NEET-UG and structural reforms in the NTA, sought a progress report, including on a high-powered committee headed by Nandan Nilekani. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the panel had consulted extensively and would likely submit its first report by end-September. The bench directed the joint secretary of the Department of Personnel and Training, which is coordinating with the committee, to file an affidavit on progress within two weeks, and indicated that the two judges would visit the agency's permanent facility near Minto Road in New Delhi to verify whether the claimed systems, infrastructure and manpower were in place. The Centre said the structure had been upgraded but human resources were only partially in place. The Hindu reports that the Centre told the court a switch to computer-based testing for NEET-UG 2027 remains under active consideration.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and cancellation → Jantar Mantar protests and loss of confidence in the NTA → penalties under the anti-unfair-means law raised to 5-10 years and ₹50 lakh → the Supreme Court pushes institutionalisation of the NTA and a Nilekani panel on technology reform → the question turns to whether IIT-conducted examinations should also be brought inside the statute

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The parent statute and what it actually criminalises —** The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is the central law against organised cheating in public examinations. It defines unfair means to include leakage of question papers or answer keys, unauthorised access to them, tampering with computer networks or resources, manipulation of seating and dates, and the conduct of fake examinations. Offences under it are cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, and investigation lies with an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or Assistant Commissioner of Police, with the Centre empowered to transfer an investigation to a central agency. The 2026 amendment reported by The Economic Times raises the quantum of imprisonment and fine. 2. **The Act reaches authorities, not subjects —** The statute's scope is defined by who conducts the examination, not by what the examination is for. Its six named categories are the UPSC, the NTA, the SSC, the Railway Recruitment Boards, the IBPS, and central ministries and departments with their attached and subordinate offices, plus any other authority the Centre notifies. This drafting choice is exactly why JEE Main is inside and JEE Advanced is outside, despite the two being consecutive stages of a single admission process. The notification power is the bridge the Centre would use if it chose to extend cover. 3. **What the National Testing Agency is, institutionally —** The NTA was established in November 2017 and functions as an autonomous, self-sustaining premier testing organisation registered as a society, under the Ministry of Education. It conducts entrance examinations including NEET-UG, JEE Main, UGC-NET and CUET. Its long-standing structural weakness, which the Supreme Court is addressing, is heavy reliance on outsourced vendors for question setting, printing, transport and centre management, and on officers on deputation rather than permanent professional staff. 4. **IITs as institutes of national importance —** The Indian Institutes of Technology are governed by the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961, which declares them institutions of national importance under Entry 64 of the Union List. Each IIT has a Board of Governors and a Senate, with the IIT Council as the apex coordinating body. JEE Advanced is conducted by the IITs on a rotational basis under the guidance of the Joint Admission Board. The autonomy argument in this story rests on that statutory character — these are not agencies of the executive but bodies Parliament created with their own academic governance. 5. **Why a computer-based test changes the threat model —** A pen-and-paper examination is vulnerable at the points where physical question papers exist — printing, storage, transport and the strongroom. A computer-based test removes most of that surface and replaces it with encrypted delivery to test centres, but introduces new vulnerabilities in centre-level collusion, remote access software and impersonation through biometric spoofing. The choice is therefore not between insecure and secure but between two different sets of failure points, one of which is easier to audit centrally.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **This sits in GS2 governance, not only in education —** The syllabus carries 'statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies' and 'government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation'. An examination agency whose failures cancel a national test for lakhs of candidates is a textbook implementation-design question, and the judicial supervision adds the separation-of-powers dimension.

	2. **Autonomy versus accountability is a recurring examiner favourite —** The paper has repeatedly asked whether institutional autonomy is compatible with external accountability, in contexts from universities to regulators to investigative agencies. The JEE Advanced question is an unusually clean instance: the same argument that protects academic freedom is being used to keep an examination outside a criminal statute, and the candidate must be able to state both sides without caricature. 3. **Judicial monitoring of administrative reform is itself examinable —** A bench proposing to visit an agency's premises to verify claimed infrastructure, and insisting that expert committee recommendations be translated into concrete institutional change rather than remain confined to reports, is continuing mandamus in substance. Whether that is necessary correction or judicial overreach is a live GS2 debate and should be argued, not asserted.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 makes offences cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, with investigation by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or Assistant Commissioner of Police. • The Act applies to examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, the National Testing Agency, the Staff Selection Commission, the Railway Recruitment Boards, the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection, and central ministries and departments with their attached and subordinate offices, plus any other authority notified by the Centre. • JEE Main is conducted by the National Testing Agency; JEE Advanced is conducted by the IITs on a rotational basis under the guidance of the Joint Admission Board, and GATE, JAM and CEED are conducted by the IITs and the Indian Institute of Science. • The National Testing Agency was established in November 2017 as an autonomous testing organisation registered as a society under the Ministry of Education, and conducts NEET-UG, JEE Main, UGC-NET and CUET. • The Indian Institutes of Technology are declared institutions of national importance under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961, with the IIT Council as the apex coordinating body. • Under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026, as reported, a person or student using unfair means may face imprisonment of five to ten years and a fine of up to ₹50 lakh. • The Department of Personnel and Training, which the Supreme Court directed to file an affidavit on the progress of NTA reforms, is part of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, held by the Prime Minister.
ANALYSIS	1. **The autonomy objection is weaker than the IIT community's own framing suggests —** Nothing in the anti-unfair-means statute touches syllabus, question standard, evaluation or admission policy, which is what academic autonomy protects. What it does is create criminal liability for leakage and organised cheating and route investigation to a police officer of a prescribed rank. An institute of national importance is not made less autonomous by having its examinations protected by the same criminal law that protects the UPSC's. The genuine concern in the reported discussion is narrower and more honest — reputational exposure, and the risk of routine invigilation disputes escalating into criminal proceedings. 2. **The real objection is proportionality, and it deserves to be taken seriously —** Five to ten years of imprisonment and up to ₹50 lakh is a sentencing range designed for organised leak syndicates, and applying it to an individual candidate caught using

unfair means is a different proposition altogether. A seventeen-year-old with a chit and a criminal network that sells a paper for lakhs are not comparable culpabilities, and the papers record precisely this concern about students' long-term careers. Good drafting would distinguish organised offences from individual misconduct with separate ranges; a single stiff range delegates that distinction to prosecutorial discretion, which is where it is least visible and least reviewable.

3. **A statute defined by conducting authority will always leave gaps —** Because the Act lists agencies rather than categories of examination, every new or restructured examination body falls outside it until notified. The absurdity is already visible: the two stages of the same engineering admission sit on opposite sides of the criminal law. A definition framed around the character of the examination — one conducted for admission to or recruitment in a publicly funded institution, above a threshold of candidates — would be self-updating. The counter-argument is that a list gives certainty and avoids over-criminalisation of private and institutional tests, which is a legitimate drafting preference and should be acknowledged.
4. **Criminal law is the cheapest and least effective of the available instruments —** Deterrence requires a credible probability of detection and conviction, not a high nominal sentence. Paper-leak prosecutions in India have historically taken years and produced few convictions, so raising the maximum sentence changes the expected cost of the crime very little. The reforms the Supreme Court is pressing — permanent staff, dedicated verticals, less reliance on deputationists, verified infrastructure — attack the probability of detection and the opportunity for leakage. Those are the expensive reforms, which is why they arrive slower than the amendment.
5. **The Centre's own admission is the most revealing line in the story —** The Centre told the bench that permanence of the physical structure had been ensured but human resources were only partially in place. That is the whole problem in one sentence: buildings are procurable and sanctioned posts are not filled, because filling them requires a permanent cadre with examination-security expertise that the system has never created. An agency conducting examinations for lakhs of candidates while staffed largely by officers on deputation has no institutional memory of its own failures, which is why each leak is investigated as if it were the first.
6. **Judicial site inspection is a symptom worth naming —** Two judges of the Supreme Court proposing to visit an agency's headquarters to verify whether claimed systems exist is an extraordinary step, and the court's own stated reason — that expert committee recommendations should not remain confined to reports — is an admission that ordinary executive accountability has failed. The defensible view is that the court is enforcing compliance with its earlier orders in a matter affecting lakhs of students. The uncomfortable view is that a court verifying manpower registers is performing an audit function that Parliament's committees and the executive's own inspection machinery exist to perform, and that the substitution weakens those institutions further.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"Extending a criminal statute on examination malpractice to autonomous institutions of national importance strengthens deterrence but raises questions of proportionality and institutional autonomy." Examine, with reference to the architecture of examination governance in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction —** State the anomaly in two sentences: the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act applies by conducting authority, so JEE Main conducted by the NTA is covered while JEE Advanced conducted by the IITs under the Joint Admission Board is not. That single fact frames the whole answer and shows you have read the statute's structure rather than the headline.

2. **Body — make the case for extension —** Deterrence parity across stages of the same admission process, cognizable and non-bailable offences with investigation by a DSP-rank officer, the availability of the Centre's notification power, and the demonstrated vulnerability after the NEET-UG 2026 leak and cancellation. Note that the Act does not touch syllabus, evaluation or admission policy, so the autonomy of academic governance under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961 is not directly abridged.

3. **Body — make the case against, at its strongest —** Proportionality: a five to ten year range with a fine up to ₹50 lakh is calibrated for organised syndicates and sits uneasily on individual candidate misconduct. Institutional concern: criminalisation shifts examination discipline from academic bodies to the police, and the reported worry about students' long-term careers is real. Concede that the IIT-IISc community's discomfort is not simply turf protection.

4. **Body — shift to the institutional reform that actually matters —** Use the Supreme Court proceedings: the Nilekani-led committee, the DoPT affidavit, the bench's insistence on permanent structure, permanent staff and dedicated verticals with limited reliance on deputationists, the Centre's admission that human resources are only partially in place, and the active consideration of computer-based testing for NEET-UG 2027. Argue that detection probability, not sentence length, is the binding constraint on deterrence.

5. **Conclusion —** Propose the drafting fix rather than a verdict: define coverage by the character of the examination rather than by a list of agencies, separate the sentencing range for organised offences from that for individual misconduct, and pair any extension with a permanent professional cadre for examination security. That is a position, arrived at by argument, which is what the question asks for.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the District Magistrate on the day of a national entrance examination in your district. Forty minutes before the paper, a credible message circulating on social media claims the question paper has leaked. What do you do in the next forty minutes?

Approach: Do not cancel and do not dismiss; verify. Have the claimed paper compared against the sealed set by the observer authorised to do so, and simultaneously have the cyber cell trace the origin and reach of the message, because a fabricated leak claim designed to force a cancellation is at least as common as a real one. Instruct centre superintendents to proceed on schedule unless you direct otherwise, since an unexplained delay will itself convert rumour into panic outside the gates. Inform the conducting agency's control room in writing at once, so that the decision to hold or cancel is taken by the authority that owns it and is recorded, and put out one factual public message saying verification is under way and the next update will come at a stated time.

Q2. An SIT under you has arrested a nineteen-year-old who bought a leaked paper from an agent, and separately has the agent. The law permits identical charges. How do you approach the two cases?

Approach: Investigate both fully, but do not pretend the culpabilities are the same. Build the agent's case as the organised offence it is, following the money and the network upward, because the syndicate is the target that matters and the buyer is evidence as much as accused. For the candidate, place the full facts before the prosecutor, including age, the absence of any role in obtaining or distributing the paper, and any cooperation, and let the charge-sheet reflect that assessment on the record rather than through informal leniency. An officer who quietly drops a case he should have argued leaves the discretion unaccountable; an officer who charges every teenager at the syndicate's level has stopped thinking.

Q3. As joint secretary coordinating an expert committee on examination reform, you

are asked to file an affidavit on progress when you know the recruitment of permanent staff has barely started. What goes into the affidavit?

Approach: The truth, stated in a way that is useful to the court. Set out what has actually been completed, what is in process with dates and sanctioned strength against persons in position, and what has not begun, and give a timeline you can defend six months later rather than one that reads well this week. An affidavit that overstates progress buys a fortnight and costs the department its credibility for the rest of the proceedings, and the court in this matter has already signalled that it intends to verify claims physically. Where the delay has a genuine cause, such as the absence of a recruitment cadre for examination security, say so plainly and ask for what you need to fix it.

7.3 From GaN Circuits to CAR-T: India's Deep-Tech Pipeline Deepens While Patents in Force Lag

THE NEWS A commentary in The Hindu by Mukundan Chakrapani and Gaurav Jain argues that three foundations of an innovation economy — public research, corporate R&D and deep-tech entrepreneurship — are now advancing together. In March 2023, DRDO scientists at the Solid State Physics Laboratory, Delhi and the Gallium Arsenide Enabling Technology Centre, Hyderabad announced a breakthrough in gallium nitride monolithic microwave integrated circuits, the know-how for which was, by widely reported accounts, refused to India under the Rafale offset provisions. DRDO is now transferring GaN High Electron Mobility Transistor-based MMIC technology for 5G and 6G infrastructure, EV on-board chargers and renewable energy inverters; India is one of seven countries to have mastered it, with China, France, Germany, Russia, South Korea and the United States. AGNIT Semiconductors, a spin-off from the Centre for Nano Science and Engineering at IISc Bengaluru, is commercialising it. The Bharat 6G Alliance aims to contribute 10% of global 6G patents by 2030; per a review meeting by Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia its members have made more than 7,700 patent filings across 5G and 6G, including over 4,400 foreign filings — applications, the authors stress, not grants or declared standard-essential patents. Almost 3,000 technical contributions were made to 3GPP last year, a fifteen-fold rise from 2020, and WIPO's 2025 Patent Cooperation Treaty rankings placed Jio Platforms 19th, its first top-20 entry. Indian patent filings grew from just over 1,10,000 in 2024-25 to more than 1,43,000 in 2025-26, a 30.2% increase, with domestic applicants at almost seven in ten; but patents in force, just over 2,40,000 in 2025, are a fraction of China's 5.7 million, the United States' 3.5 million and Japan's 2.1 million. The authors cite Pixxel Space, founded by two BITS Pilani alumni, with six hyperspectral imaging satellites in orbit and 18 to 24 planned; Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 launch and Agnikul Cosmos's reusable launch vehicle work; and ImmunoACT, incubated at IIT Bombay with the Tata Memorial Centre, whose NexCAR19 is India's first indigenous CAR-T cell therapy, at a tenth of typical costs. Separately, The Hindu reports that India Deep Tech Alliance members invested ₹2,170 crore in 56 deep-tech firms over the last year, announced at Semicon India 2026; Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay Kumar Sood said this showed the vision behind the Department of Science and Technology's ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation scheme translating into measurable action. Energy and climate start-ups took over 30% of the capital, eight firms receiving ₹655 crore, and AI nearly 30%, with 16 firms receiving ₹639 crore.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Technology denial under the Rafale offsets → DRDO laboratories build GaN MMIC capability in-house → academic institutions supply the talent and an IISc spin-off commercialises it → patent filings and standards contributions rise sharply → but patents in force and translational funding lag, so ownership of the value chain remains incomplete

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **A filing, a grant and a patent in force are three different things —** A patent application is a claim; a grant is the examined and allowed monopoly; a patent in force is a granted patent on which renewal fees continue to be paid, which is the only one of the three that signals commercial value. Under the Patents Act, 1970 the term is twenty years from the date of filing, and applications are published eighteen months from priority. The gap in the op-ed's own figures — filings up 30.2% while patents in force stand at just over 2,40,000 — is the difference between filing behaviour and commercial value, and it is the statistic examiners reward candidates for understanding.

	2. **The Patent Cooperation Treaty is a filing route, not a world patent —** The PCT, administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization, lets an applicant file one international application that preserves the right to seek protection in member states, with national phase entry later. There is no such thing as a global patent; grant remains national. India's patent administration sits with the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. WIPO's annual PCT rankings, in which Jio Platforms placed 19th, therefore measure international filing activity, not granted rights. 3. **Standard-essential patents are where telecom money is made —** 3GPP is the body that develops mobile telecommunications standards, and a patent whose use is unavoidable in implementing a standard becomes a standard-essential patent, licensed on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms. A country that only implements standards pays royalties; a country whose firms hold SEPs receives them. This is precisely why the op-ed distinguishes 7,700 filings from declared SEPs, and why the Bharat 6G Alliance's target is framed as a share of global 6G patents. 4. **Gallium nitride is a wide-bandgap semiconductor, and that is the whole point —** GaN has a much wider bandgap than silicon, so devices built on it tolerate higher voltages, higher frequencies and higher temperatures. That makes GaN High Electron Mobility Transistors the material of choice for active electronically scanned array radar, satellite communications, electric vehicle chargers and solar inverters. A monolithic microwave integrated circuit fabricates the amplifiers, mixers and switches of a microwave system on a single chip. Because of the defence applications, the technology is tightly export-controlled, which is why indigenous mastery is a strategic and not merely a commercial fact. 5. **CAR-T therapy, in one paragraph —** Chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy takes a patient's own T cells, genetically engineers them to express a receptor targeting a tumour antigen, expands them and reinfuses them. NexCAR19, developed by ImmunoACT with IIT Bombay and the Tata Memorial Centre, targets the CD19 antigen found on certain B-cell cancers. It is a living drug, manufactured per patient, which is why cost has been the barrier globally and why a tenth-of-cost Indian version matters for access rather than for novelty alone.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **This is the GS3 indigenisation question in its purest form —** 'Achievements of Indians in science and technology; indigenising technology and developing new technology' is verbatim syllabus. The GaN story supplies the causal sequence the examiner wants — denial, public laboratory response, academic talent pipeline, start-up commercialisation — rather than a list of achievements. 2. **Intellectual property is examined as an economics question, not a law question —** UPSC has asked about India's innovation ecosystem, about why research spending has not translated into commercial outcomes, and about the gap between patents filed and value captured. The filings-versus-patents-in-force contrast, and the SEP point, let a candidate make that argument with numbers rather than adjectives. 3. **Space and biotech start-ups are now standard illustration material —** Hyperspectral imaging satellites, private launch vehicles and indigenous cell therapy are examples that serve answers on private participation in space, on affordable healthcare innovation, and on start-up policy simultaneously. Carrying four or five such named examples with one specific fact each is more useful than carrying a scheme list.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Gallium nitride is a wide-bandgap semiconductor used in High Electron Mobility Transistors and monolithic microwave integrated circuits, with applications in radar, satellite communications, electric vehicle chargers and solar inverters.

- The Solid State Physics Laboratory in Delhi and the Gallium Arsenide Enabling Technology Centre in Hyderabad are DRDO establishments associated with India's gallium nitride MMIC capability.
- The Patent Cooperation Treaty is administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization and provides a unified international filing route; patents are still granted nationally, and India's patent office functions under the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- A standard-essential patent is one whose use is unavoidable in implementing a technical standard, and is licensed on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms; 3GPP is the body that develops mobile telecommunications standards.
- The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council is a public sector enterprise set up by the Department of Biotechnology to support early-stage biotechnology innovation.
- NexCAR19, developed by ImmunoACT with IIT Bombay and the Tata Memorial Centre, is India's first indigenous CAR-T cell therapy and targets the CD19 antigen.
- The Bharat 6G Alliance has stated a target of contributing 10% of global 6G patents by 2030, and the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India heads the office that advises the Prime Minister on science and technology policy.

ANALYSIS

1. **Denial is the most reliable innovation policy India has ever had —** The GaN MMIC capability was built after the technology was withheld under the Rafale offset provisions; the cryogenic engine, the supercomputer and the nuclear fuel cycle follow the same pattern. This is worth stating precisely because it cuts against the assumption that access to foreign technology accelerates capability. Access often substitutes for capability, because importing is cheaper than inventing until it is not available at all. The policy implication is uncomfortable but real: capability in strategic sectors tends to be built when procurement stops being an option, which argues for treating some import dependencies as deliberate policy failures rather than efficient sourcing.
2. **The filing numbers are impressive and the ownership numbers are not —** Filings rose 30.2% in a year to more than 1,43,000, with domestic applicants at nearly seven in ten, and Jio entered the PCT top 20. Yet patents in force stand at just over 2,40,000 against China's 5.7 million. A patent in force is one whose owner is paying renewal fees because it is worth holding, so the ratio of filings to patents in force measures whether inventions are reaching markets. India's filing surge is real but recent, and much of it will never be renewed. The authors' own caution — that 7,700 filings are applications, not grants or declared SEPs — is the correct way to read every such number.
3. **Examiner capacity is the bottleneck nobody campaigns about —** The op-ed names expanding examiner capacity at the patent office as a requirement, and it deserves more weight than it gets. A filing surge without a matching examination capacity converts into pendency, and pendency destroys the commercial value of a patent because the licensing negotiation cannot begin until rights are certain. This is an unglamorous administrative reform of exactly the kind that determines whether the innovation rhetoric produces revenue, and it costs a rounding error compared with the ₹1 lakh crore RDI scheme.
4. **Standards participation may matter more than patent counts —** Nearly 3,000 technical contributions to 3GPP last year, a fifteen-fold increase from 2020, is arguably the strongest signal in the entire piece. Standards bodies are where the technical architecture of a network generation is decided, and firms in the room shape specifications towards technologies they own. A country that shows up with

	contributions is bidding to own; a country that shows up with a patent count is bidding to be counted. The 6G Alliance's target of 10% of global 6G patents by 2030 will be met or missed largely in those committee rooms. 5. **Public capital and private capital are being conflated in the announcements —** The India Deep Tech Alliance's ₹2,170 crore across 56 firms was, on its own statement, invested independently by individual members according to their own strategies — that is ordinary venture capital, not a pooled fund and not a government programme. Presenting it alongside the ₹1 lakh crore RDI scheme as evidence that the scheme's vision is translating into action is a rhetorical move, not a causal claim. The honest reading is that private deep-tech capital has arrived and the public scheme has not yet deployed at scale; whether the second caused the first is unestablished. 6. **The allocation pattern tells you what investors think India can win —** Energy and climate start-ups took over 30% of the capital across just eight firms at ₹655 crore, AI nearly 30% across 16 firms at ₹639 crore, and quantum, robotics and space split a similar share across 21 companies. The concentration in energy — fewer firms, larger cheques — suggests capital-intensive hardware bets, while the wider spread in quantum, robotics and space suggests earlier-stage exploration. That pattern is consistent with a market that believes India can manufacture energy technology at scale before it can build a quantum computer, which is a sober judgement worth taking seriously rather than resisting.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's innovation story is strong on filings and weak on ownership." Critically examine India's progress from technology implementer to technology owner, with reference to intellectual property, standards participation and deep-tech entrepreneurship. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the distinction the question turns on in one sentence: filing a patent is a claim, holding a patent in force is ownership, and holding a standard-essential patent is the ability to charge others. Then state the three-strand framework — public research, corporate R&D and deep-tech entrepreneurship — because it organises the whole answer. 2. **Body — evidence of genuine progress —** GaN MMIC capability at DRDO's SSPL and GAETEC after technology denial under the Rafale offsets, with India among seven countries mastering it and AGNIT commercialising it from IISc; patent filings up from over 1,10,000 to more than 1,43,000, a 30.2% rise, with domestic applicants at nearly seven in ten; Jio Platforms at 19th in WIPO's 2025 PCT rankings; nearly 3,000 3GPP contributions, a fifteen-fold increase since 2020. 3. **Body — where ownership still fails —** Patents in force at just over 2,40,000 against China's 5.7 million, the United States' 3.5 million and Japan's 2.1 million; the 7,700 Bharat 6G Alliance filings being applications rather than grants or declared SEPs; patent office examiner capacity; and the translational gap between a granted patent and a first paying customer. Make the point that a filing surge without renewals is activity, not ownership. 4. **Body — the institutional pipeline as the real subject —** Use the GaN sequence as the model: government laboratory builds foundational capability, academic institution supplies talent and research base, start-up carries it to market. Corroborate with Pixxel's hyperspectral satellites, Skyroot's Vikram-1, Agnikul's reusable vehicle work, and ImmunoACT's NexCAR19 at a tenth of typical cost. Note the ₹1 lakh crore RDI scheme and BIRAC as the funding layer, while distinguishing public schemes from the ₹2,170 crore of independent private investment by IDTA members. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that the binding constraints are administrative and translational

rather than inspirational: standardised technology-transfer terms for publicly funded intellectual property, examiner capacity at the patent office, and funding for the gap between a granted patent and a first customer. A conclusion that names three fixable things reads as policy; one that calls for a culture of innovation reads as filler.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You head technology transfer at a government laboratory that has developed a strategically sensitive technology. A domestic start-up and a better-capitalised multinational both want to license it. How do you decide?

Approach: Start by separating the two questions that are usually confused: who can pay most, and who will actually deploy the technology in India. For a technology developed with public money and carrying export-control sensitivity, the licence terms should specify domestic manufacture, milestones for commercial production and reversion if they are missed, rather than simply maximising the upfront fee. A non-exclusive licence to both, with field-of-use restrictions, is often better than choosing, because it preserves competition and hedges execution risk. Whatever the decision, publish the standard terms in advance, since a transfer regime whose terms are negotiated case by case attracts allegations of favouritism that will outlast the technology.

Q2. As a Secretary designing the disbursement rules for a large research and innovation fund, how do you prevent it from becoming a subsidy for work that would have happened anyway?

Approach: Fund the stage where private capital demonstrably does not go — the gap between a granted patent and a first paying customer, prototype-to-pilot scale-up, and certification and regulatory testing costs — rather than the stages venture capital already covers. Require co-investment so that someone with their own money at risk has validated the technology, and structure support so that failure is permitted but non-performance is not, with staged release against verifiable milestones. Build in an independent evaluation after three years measuring products reaching market and patents renewed, not papers published or applications filed. And accept publicly at the outset that a meaningful share of funded projects will fail, because a scheme judged by its failure rate will fund only safe work and defeat its own purpose.

Q3. An interview board asks: India files a large and rising number of patents but holds few in force. What does that tell you, and what would you do about it?

Approach: It tells you that the incentive structure rewards filing rather than commercialising. Filings are counted in institutional rankings, faculty assessments and scheme metrics, while renewal fees are a real cost paid only when a patent is earning or defending something, so the gap is a measure of how much of the activity is performative. I would change what is measured — evaluate institutions on licensing revenue, patents renewed beyond the fifth year and products reaching market, not on applications filed. Alongside that, I would fix the administrative constraint by expanding examiner capacity, since pendency delays the certainty of rights that any licensing negotiation depends on. The aim is to make ownership, not filing, the thing that pays.

8. Society & Social Issues

Two stories about the machinery a society builds to handle its own injustices, and what happens when that machinery stalls. In Mumbai a third High Court Bench begins afresh on a Maratha quota law that has already outlived two Benches and one Supreme Court striking-down, while in corporate India the number of sexual harassment complaints rises for the third straight year — and the experts insist that rising complaints are the good news. One is a claim to group entitlement that the courts keep refusing and the legislature keeps re-enacting; the other is a grievance system that works where it is watched and barely exists where it is not.

8.1 Third Bombay High Court Bench to Hear the Maratha 10% Quota Challenge From October 9

THE NEWS The Bombay High Court said on Friday that it will begin hearing on October 9 the petitions for and against the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2024, which gives 10% reservation to Marathas in education and services in the State. A Bench of Justices Makarand Karnik, N.J. Jamadar and Sandeep Marne will hear the petitions. The matter reached this Bench after hearings before two earlier Benches stopped. A Bench comprising Chief Justice Devendra Upadhyay, Justice Girish Kulkarni and Justice Firdosh Pooniwalla had initially heard the petitions, but Justice Upadhyay was moved to the Delhi High Court. A Bench led by Justice Ravindra Ghuge then heard the matter from May 2025 to August 2025; with Justice Ghuge subsequently elevated as Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, the hearings before the second Bench ground to a halt as well. The SEBC Act was passed by the legislature on February 20, 2024 and notified by the State government led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis six days later. The enactment followed a report by the Maharashtra State Commission for Backward Classes led by Justice Sunil B. Shukre, which cited circumstances and situations warranting the grant of reservation to the Maratha community beyond the 50% limit on reservation. The earlier statute had given Marathas 16% reservation in State government jobs and education. An advocate moved the Bombay High Court against that Act, and the court upheld it in June 2019; it held, however, that the 16% quota could not be justified and reduced it to 12% in education and 13% in jobs under the government. This was then challenged in the Supreme Court. In May 2021, the Supreme Court struck down the SEBC Act, 2018, holding that no circumstances justified reservation for Marathas beyond the 50% ceiling set by the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment; the court also questioned the data submitted to show the backwardness of Marathas. The State government filed a review petition, which the court rejected in April 2023. It then filed a curative petition, which remains before the Supreme Court. The Hindu carried a file photograph of Maratha Kranti Morcha members burning tyres on the Pune-Solapur highway during a rasta roko protest.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Indra Sawhney fixes a 50% ceiling in 1992 → Maharashtra legislates 16% for Marathas in 2018 → Supreme Court strikes it down in 2021 for want of extraordinary circumstances and for weak data → a fresh Commission report and a fresh 10% Act in 2024 → two High Court Benches dissolve as their judges are transferred and elevated → a third Bench starts the hearing over in October 2026

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The reservation power sits in Articles 15 and 16, not in a single quota clause —** Article 15(4), inserted by the First Amendment in 1951, permits the State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, and Article 15(5), inserted by the Ninety-third Amendment, extends this to admission in educational institutions including private unaided ones. Article 16(4) separately permits reservation in appointments for any backward class of citizens not adequately represented in the services of the State. Article 16(4A) allows reservation in promotion with consequential seniority for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes only, and Article 16(4B) allows carry-forward of unfilled reserved vacancies. A State law creating a Maratha quota therefore has to be defended under Article 15(4) and Article 16(4), and the enabling nature of these provisions means no community has an enforceable right to be reserved.

2. **Indra Sawhney is the case the entire dispute turns on —** Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) was decided by a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court. It upheld the 27% quota for Other Backward Classes, held that backwardness under Article 16(4) is

	primarily social and that caste may be the starting point of identification, excluded the creamy layer from the benefit, held that reservation in promotion is impermissible under Article 16(4), and laid down that reservation should ordinarily not exceed 50% of the available posts except in extraordinary situations arising out of the peculiar conditions of far-flung and remote areas. That single exception is the door every State quota beyond 50% has since tried to walk through, and it is the door the Supreme Court shut on the 2018 Maharashtra law. 3. **The 102nd and 105th Amendments decide who may even identify a backward class —** The Constitution (One Hundred and Second Amendment) Act, 2018 gave constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes under Article 338B and inserted Article 342A, providing for a Central List of socially and educationally backward classes notified by the President. In the 2021 Maratha judgment the Supreme Court read these provisions as taking away the States' power to identify their own backward classes. Parliament reversed that reading through the Constitution (One Hundred and Fifth Amendment) Act, 2021, which amended Article 342A and inserted Article 366(26C) to restore the power of every State and Union Territory to prepare and maintain its own list of socially and educationally backward classes. Maharashtra's 2024 Act was enacted under that restored power. 4. **A curative petition is the last door in Indian litigation —** After a review petition is dismissed, the only remaining remedy is a curative petition, a jurisdiction the Supreme Court created for itself in Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra (2002) to prevent abuse of process and to cure a gross miscarriage of justice. It is circulated first to the three senior-most judges and the judges who passed the impugned order, it is ordinarily decided in chambers without oral hearing, and it must be certified by a senior advocate. That Maharashtra's curative petition against the 2021 judgment is still pending is why the fresh 2024 Act and the old challenge now run on two tracks at once.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Reservation is the most reliably examined single topic across GS1 and GS2 —** The syllabus carries social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism in GS1, and mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections in GS2. The Maratha case sits on both, because it is simultaneously a question about a dominant landholding community's claim to backwardness and a question about the constitutional machinery that decides such claims. 2. **The examiner prefers the doctrine to the agitation —** Questions on this theme have historically asked about the rationale and limits of the 50% rule, about creamy layer, about the basis on which backwardness is determined, and about whether economic criteria alone can found a reservation. A candidate who writes only about Maratha protests and quota politics is answering a newspaper question; the one who writes about the extraordinary-circumstances exception, the quality of the empirical data and the identification power under Article 342A is answering the paper. 3. **Judicial delay by transfer is itself an examinable point on the judiciary —** Two Benches dissolved because judges were transferred or elevated, and the case restarts a third time. That is a clean, dated illustration for any answer on pendency, on the master-of-the-roster power of the Chief Justice, or on the case for permanent subject-wise Benches for constitutional matters, and it is far more persuasive than a general complaint about arrears.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 15(4) permits special provision for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes and for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; Article 16(4) permits reservation in appointments for backward classes

not adequately represented in the services of the State.

- Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) was decided by a nine-judge Bench; it excluded the creamy layer, barred reservation in promotion under Article 16(4), and held that reservation should ordinarily not exceed 50% except in extraordinary situations.
- Article 338B, inserted by the Constitution (One Hundred and Second Amendment) Act, 2018, gives constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes; Article 342A provides for the Central List of socially and educationally backward classes.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Fifth Amendment) Act, 2021 restored the power of States and Union Territories to prepare and maintain their own lists of socially and educationally backward classes, and inserted Article 366(26C).
- The Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2024 provides 10% reservation for Marathas in education and in services in the State; it was passed on February 20, 2024 and notified six days later.
- The predecessor SEBC Act, 2018 granted 16% reservation; the Bombay High Court in June 2019 upheld the Act but reduced the quota to 12% in education and 13% in government jobs, and the Supreme Court struck the Act down in May 2021.
- A curative petition, the remedy recognised in Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra (2002), lies only after a review petition has been dismissed and is ordinarily decided in chambers without oral hearing.

ANALYSIS

1. **The State did not answer the 2021 judgment, it lowered the number —** The Supreme Court in 2021 did not merely say the quota was too large; it said no extraordinary circumstances justified crossing the ceiling at all, and it questioned the data offered to establish Maratha backwardness. A law that reduces the figure from 16% to 10% answers the first objection arithmetically and the second not at all, unless the Shukre Commission's fresh evidence is materially better than the Gaikwad Commission's was. The entire case on October 9 will therefore turn on the quality of one report, not on the size of one percentage. This is the point most answers miss, because the percentage is what the headlines carry.

2. **The 50% ceiling has already been breached once, and everybody in the courtroom knows it —** The 103rd Amendment's 10% reservation for economically weaker sections takes total reservation past 50% in most States, and the Supreme Court upheld it in Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India (2022) on the reasoning that the ceiling applies to the Article 15(4) and 16(4) quotas and that the EWS quota stands on a separate constitutional footing. Maharashtra can therefore argue that the ceiling is no longer an absolute basic-structure limit but a rule of ordinary construction. The counter is that Janhit Abhiyan carefully did not disturb the ceiling for backward-class reservation, and that a distinction drawn to save one quota cannot be borrowed to save another. That argument is genuinely open, and an honest answer says so.

3. **A dominant landholding community claiming backwardness is a harder case, not an impossible one —** Marathas are politically dominant in Maharashtra, have held the Chief Ministership repeatedly and control much of the cooperative sugar and rural credit economy, which is why the courts have repeatedly asked for evidence rather than assertion. But political dominance of a community's elite is not the same as the social and educational position of its median household, and agrarian distress can produce real backwardness within a numerically large caste. The legal test is empirical, and the honest position is that the claim fails or succeeds on data that neither the protests nor the counter-protests have ever produced in public.

	4. **Re-legislating after a striking-down is a recognisable pattern of competitive federal politics —** Maharashtra is not alone: Tamil Nadu's 69% reservation survives only in the Ninth Schedule, and several States have enacted quotas that were struck down and re-enacted. The incentive structure is plain, because a legislature that passes an unconstitutional law absorbs no political cost and transfers the blame for the outcome to the judiciary, while the community's mobilisation is answered without any resource being spent. The result is a cycle in which each round buys several years of litigation and one election. Naming that incentive is a sharper criticism than calling the law unconstitutional. 5. **Three Benches in two years is a structural failure, not bad luck —** The first Bench dissolved when the Chief Justice was transferred to Delhi, the second when its presiding judge was elevated to head the Calcutta High Court. Both events are routine features of the collegium system, and neither is anybody's fault. What is a failure is that a constitutional challenge of this magnitude has no mechanism to survive the movement of a single judge, so the hearing restarts from the beginning each time. A designated constitutional Bench with staggered membership, or a rule that part-heard constitutional matters continue before the remaining judges, would cost nothing and would have saved two years here. 6. **The real distributive question is never litigated —** Reservation allocates a share of government jobs and college seats, and the number of both has been shrinking relative to the size of each cohort for two decades. Every quota dispute is therefore a contest over a shrinking prize, which is exactly why it grows more bitter as the prize shrinks. Courts cannot say this, because the question before them is constitutional validity and not economic sense, but a policy answer that stops at the 50% rule has not reached the hard part.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The persistence of quota agitations by numerically large and politically dominant communities suggests that the reservation debate in India has outgrown the constitutional framework designed for it." Critically examine in the light of the litigation over the Maharashtra SEBC legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the constitutional design rather than the agitation. One or two sentences on Articles 15(4) and 16(4) as enabling provisions, and on Indra Sawhney (1992) fixing a 50% ceiling subject to an extraordinary-circumstances exception. Then name the fact pattern in one line: a 2018 Act struck down in 2021, a 2024 Act granting 10%, and a challenge listed before a third High Court Bench from October 9. 2. **Body — the constitutional position, stated exactly —** Set out what the 2021 judgment actually held, that no extraordinary circumstances justified crossing the ceiling and that the backwardness data was unsatisfactory. Add the 102nd Amendment's Article 338B and 342A and the 105th Amendment restoring the States' identification power, because that amendment is what makes the 2024 Act possible. Precision here is what separates the top answers. 3. **Body — why the framework is under strain —** Argue that the framework assumed a small identified set of backward classes competing for an expanding public sector, and that both assumptions have failed. Use the 103rd Amendment and Janhit Abhiyan (2022) to show the ceiling has already been crossed on a separate footing, and note the shrinking share of formal public employment. This is the paragraph that answers the 'outgrown' in the question. 4. **Body — the counter-view, honestly made —** Concede that the framework has actually held. The courts have insisted on empirical proof of backwardness, have preserved the creamy-layer exclusion, and have refused to let political mobilisation substitute for

data. A framework that keeps saying no to a politically powerful claim is functioning, not failing, and the examiner rewards the candidate who sees this.

5. **Conclusion —** Close on what would actually reduce the pressure: credible and published caste-wise socio-economic data so that backwardness is determined on evidence rather than on agitation, sub-categorisation so that benefits reach the weakest within each list, and expansion of opportunity outside government employment. Avoid a demand for or against reservation; the question asks about the framework.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the District Magistrate of a district where a rasta roko on a national highway has begun in support of the quota and is entering its third day. An ambulance corridor is being blocked intermittently. What do you do?

Approach: Separate the two problems immediately, because the protest is a lawful expression and the blocked ambulance is not. Establish a guaranteed emergency corridor first, in writing and with the agitation leaders' own volunteers marshalling it, since a commitment they police themselves holds better than one imposed on them. Open a channel with the recognised leadership the same day and give them a named officer and a fixed time each morning, because leaderless agitations are the ones that turn violent. Keep force visible but in reserve, record everything on video for your own protection as much as theirs, and be truthful about what you can and cannot deliver — you cannot promise a quota, but you can promise that their memorandum reaches the State government and that they will be told when it does.

Q2. The State government asks you to nominate an officer to collect household survey data on the social and educational status of a community, with a very short deadline and an evident political expectation about the result. How do you handle the instruction?

Approach: Treat the deadline as negotiable and the method as not. Accept the task, but put on record in writing the sample design, the enumerator training, the supervision ratio and the time those require, because an officer who accepts an impossible timeline silently owns the failure later. Insist on standard instruments and independent supervision, and decline to see or transmit any interim tabulation that could be used to steer field work. If the expectation is communicated informally, respond formally, since the Supreme Court has twice questioned the data in this very dispute and a survey that cannot withstand cross-examination harms the community it was meant to help more than no survey at all.

Q3. During the agitation, members of another backward community in your district petition you saying their share of seats will shrink and they fear clashes. What is your approach?

Approach: Take the fear seriously rather than treating it as communal mischief, because it is a rational response to a real distributive conflict. Meet them separately and then, if both sides agree, jointly, and put the actual arithmetic before them, since much of the alarm rests on rumours about numbers that the law does not contain. Strengthen the peace committee at ward and village level and identify the specific locations with a history of friction rather than policing the district uniformly. Be clear that you neither make nor oppose the policy, and say so plainly; an officer who appears to take a side in a quota dispute loses the ability to hold either side later.

8.2 POSH Complaints at Nifty 50 Companies Rise to 1,327 in FY26, the Third Straight Annual Increase

THE NEWS An Economic Times analysis found that India's bellwether Nifty 50 companies reported a total of 1,327 complaints under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act in FY26, a 4.6% rise from 1,269 in the previous fiscal, across all 50 companies in the basket. Excluding two companies for which comparable data is unavailable, complaints across the remaining 48 have risen steadily over two years, by 6.3% in FY25 over FY24 and 5.2% in FY26 over FY25. The paper's experts were unanimous that a higher case count should not be read as an indicator of the extent of workplace sexual harassment, but rather of more women employees feeling encouraged to come forward as companies increase awareness. Vishal Kedia, POSH expert and trainer at Complykaro, called it a positive outcome of the mandatory annual employee sensitisation the POSH Act requires, and an indirect outcome of POSH incidents like TCS Nashik, widely covered by the media, which forces company managements to take cognisance of the reputational and criminal consequences of non-compliance. Pallavi Pareek, founder of Ungender, said that larger listed companies subject to the Securities and Exchange Board of India's disclosure requirements are reporting more, while in the mid-market and smaller enterprise segment significant underreporting persists, and that more reporting is a sign of greater trust because women are coming forward believing something will be done. The bulk of reported cases continue to involve verbal harassment, unwanted communication and misuse of power in hierarchical relationships. Pareek added that digital harassment over messaging platforms, email and social media has grown significantly since remote and hybrid work became mainstream, and that where a decade ago most reported cases involved severe or repeated conduct, organisations with mature Internal Committee cultures now see complaints about inappropriate remarks, exclusionary behaviour and subtle coercion. Madhumita Mitra, an advocate who handles sexual harassment cases, said POSH compliance is better in the formal sector and dismal in the informal sector, which forms 90% of India's workforce, and that many districts lack designated officers, properly constituted local complaints committees and adequate access for victims. She noted that courts have filled gaps in the legislation by acknowledging that virtual workplaces such as WhatsApp and social media messages can be used for inquiries, and that there has been a reaffirmation of impact over intent. Peer-level complaints are also rising, which Mitra called a challenge for HR policymakers and for the Internal Complaints Committee in defining boundaries that emphasise consent.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Vishaka guidelines in 1997 fill a statutory vacuum → the POSH Act, 2013 makes an Internal Committee and annual sensitisation compulsory → listed-company disclosure rules make the numbers public → awareness and a publicised case raise trust in the process → complaints at Nifty 50 firms rise for a third year → but the informal sector, which is 90% of the workforce, has no comparable machinery at all

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Act is the codification of a judgment, and that origin explains its shape —** In Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997), following the gang rape of a social worker in Rajasthan, the Supreme Court held that sexual harassment at the workplace violates the fundamental rights to equality under Articles 14 and 15, to practise any profession or carry on any occupation under Article 19(1)(g), and to life and personal liberty under Article 21. Invoking Article 32 and drawing on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, it laid down binding guidelines that operated as law for sixteen years until Parliament enacted the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Because the Act grew out of writ guidelines, it places the primary obligation on the employer rather than on the police, which is both its strength and its enforcement weakness. Section 2(n) accordingly defines sexual harassment widely, covering physical contact and advances, a demand for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, while Section 3(2) adds an implied threat about employment status and the creation of a hostile work environment.

2. **Two committees, and the second one is the one that barely exists —** Section 4 requires every employer of an establishment with ten or more workers to constitute an Internal Committee, whose presiding officer must be a woman employed at a senior level, with at least two members from among employees committed to the cause of women or with legal knowledge, and one member from a non-governmental

	organisation or a person familiar with the issues of sexual harassment; at least one-half of the total members must be women. Section 6 requires the District Officer to constitute a Local Committee for establishments with fewer than ten workers and for complaints against the employer himself. It is the Local Committee that is meant to serve domestic workers, construction workers and the unorganised sector, and it is the Local Committee that the practitioners quoted say many districts simply do not have. 3. **The procedural architecture is short, and its numbers are examinable —** Section 9 requires a written complaint within three months of the incident, extendable by a further three months for recorded reasons. Section 10 allows conciliation at the aggrieved woman's request, but no monetary settlement may be the basis of it. The committee has the powers of a civil court for summoning and document production under Section 11, must complete the inquiry within ninety days, and the employer must act on the recommendation within sixty days of receiving the report. Section 14 permits action against a false or malicious complaint, though the Act expressly says that mere inability to substantiate a complaint shall not attract it. Section 16 prohibits publication of the identity of the woman, the respondent and the witnesses. 4. **Disclosure is what turns compliance into data —** Section 21 requires the Internal Committee and the Local Committee to submit an annual report to the employer and the District Officer, and Section 22 requires the employer to include the number of cases filed and disposed of in its own annual report. For listed companies this obligation is reinforced by the disclosure requirements administered by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, which is precisely why a newspaper can count complaints across the Nifty 50 and cannot do the same for an unlisted firm. Section 26 provides a penalty of up to ₹50,000 for an employer's failure to constitute a committee or to comply, with enhanced punishment and cancellation of licence or registration on repetition. In Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa (2023) the Supreme Court recorded serious lacunae in implementation and directed the Union, States and Union Territories to verify that the required committees had actually been constituted.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Women's issues in GS1 and vulnerable-section machinery in GS2 meet here —** The syllabus carries the role of women and women's organisation, and separately the mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections. The POSH Act is the single cleanest example of a mechanism that exists on paper everywhere and in practice only where somebody is watching, which is the exact shape of question the examiner likes to set. 2. **The examiner asks about the gap between legislation and implementation —** Questions in this area have consistently asked whether legislation alone can secure the position of women, and about the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms. A rising complaint count that experts read as a good sign is a gift to such an answer, because it lets a candidate demonstrate that in grievance systems the raw number is not the outcome variable — reporting rate is. 3. **The formal-informal divide is the recurring frame for every labour and gender question —** That compliance is better in the formal sector and dismal in the informal sector, which the practitioner quoted puts at 90% of India's workforce, is the same divide that runs through social security, minimum wages and occupational safety. A candidate who can carry one structural insight across several answers is doing what the examiner is testing for.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 codified the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997), which rested on Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21 and on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women.

- Section 4 requires an Internal Committee in every establishment with ten or more workers; its presiding officer must be a woman employed at a senior level and at least one-half of its members must be women.
- Section 6 requires the District Officer to constitute a Local Committee for establishments with fewer than ten workers and for complaints made against the employer.
- A complaint must be made in writing within three months of the incident under Section 9, extendable by a further three months for reasons recorded in writing; the inquiry must be completed within ninety days, and the employer must act on the committee's recommendations within sixty days of receiving the report.
- Section 21 requires the committee to file an annual report with the employer and the District Officer, and Section 22 requires the employer to disclose the number of cases filed and disposed of in its annual report.
- Section 26 prescribes a penalty of up to ₹50,000 for contravention by an employer, with enhanced punishment and cancellation of licence or registration for a repeat offence.
- Section 2(o) defines workplace to include transportation provided by the employer and, for domestic workers, a dwelling place or house.

ANALYSIS

1. **A rising complaint count is the wrong statistic to be frightened of, and the right one to interrogate —** Sexual harassment is a crime of low reporting, so the observed number measures the willingness to report multiplied by the incidence, and a system that is working will show the first term rising faster than the second falls. The 4.6% rise to 1,327 complaints across the Nifty 50 therefore tells us something about trust and nothing directly about prevalence. The corollary is uncomfortable and worth writing: a company reporting zero complaints is far more likely to have a dead committee than a safe workplace. Any answer that reads a rising number as deteriorating conditions has misread the instrument.

2. **What is being measured is disclosure capacity, not safety —** The reason an analysis of this kind is possible at all is that Nifty 50 firms are listed and bound by disclosure requirements. The same analysis cannot be run for an unlisted mid-sized manufacturer, a district hospital or a construction site, so the dataset systematically samples the most compliant fraction of Indian employment. Presenting a 4.6% change in that sample as a national trend would be an error of inference, and the practitioners quoted in the report are careful not to make it. The honest statement is that we have good data about 50 companies and almost none about the rest.

3. **The Local Committee is the Act's real failure, and it is a State government failure —** The Internal Committee is the employer's obligation and large employers meet it because non-compliance is visible to regulators and investors. The Local Committee is the District Officer's obligation, it serves precisely those workers who have no employer with a reputation to protect, and the practitioner quoted says many districts lack designated officers and properly constituted local committees. The consequence is that the Act protects the women who were already best protected. This is not a drafting flaw but an administrative one, which means it is fixable without amending anything.

4. **Peer-level complaints change what the committee is being asked to do —** A complaint against a superior is an abuse of a power relation, and the committee's task is to establish the facts and the imbalance. A complaint against a colleague of equal rank asks the committee to draw a line about conduct between equals, on evidence that is often a chat thread and a disputed intention. The reaffirmation of impact over

	intent gives the committee a workable test, but it also raises the stakes of getting it wrong, because a wrongly upheld complaint destroys a career and a wrongly rejected one destroys trust in the process. Internal committees staffed by HR generalists are not equipped for this, and the Act's requirement of an external member is the only structural safeguard against it. 5. **The virtual workplace was not in the 2013 drafter's contemplation and the courts have had to stretch the text —** Section 2(o) defines workplace by physical extension — premises, sites, transport, a dwelling house — because in 2013 that was what a workplace was. Harassment now travels over messaging platforms, email and social media, and the report notes that courts have acknowledged that virtual workplaces and social media messages can be used for inquiries. Judicial extension has worked so far, but it leaves the jurisdiction of an internal committee over an after-hours message resting on interpretation rather than on text. Where the boundary of the workplace is itself the contested fact, a statutory amendment is preferable to case-by-case stretching. 6. **Awareness is a cheap intervention and the evidence here suggests it works —** The expert quoted attributes the rise to the mandatory annual sensitisation the Act requires and to the publicity around a single well-covered case. Both are inexpensive relative to litigation and compensation, and both act on the same variable — the employee's belief that reporting will produce a result. The policy implication is that enforcement effort is better spent on ensuring that committees exist and that people know they exist than on raising the penalty from ₹50,000, since a penalty that is never levied deters nothing while a sensitisation session that is attended changes reporting behaviour measurably.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The effectiveness of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 is best judged not by the number of complaints it generates but by where those complaints come from." Examine this statement with reference to the formal and informal segments of India's workforce. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Begin with the Act's origin in the Vishaka guidelines of 1997 and their constitutional basis in Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21, and state the paradox the question rests on in a single line: complaint numbers at large listed companies have risen for a third year, while the segment that employs the overwhelming majority of working women generates almost no complaints at all. 2. **Body — why rising numbers indicate success, argued and not asserted —** Explain that in an under-reported offence the observed count is incidence multiplied by willingness to report, that mandatory annual sensitisation and disclosure obligations act on the second term, and that a zero-complaint establishment is more likely to have a dormant committee than a safe one. Use the FY26 figure across the Nifty 50 as the illustration, not as the argument. 3. **Body — locate the failure precisely —** Distinguish the Internal Committee under Section 4, which is the employer's duty and which large employers discharge, from the Local Committee under Section 6, which is the District Officer's duty and which serves those without an accountable employer. Note that the Supreme Court in Aureliano Fernandes (2023) directed verification of committee constitution. This paragraph is where the answer earns its marks. 4. **Body — the emerging pressures —** Cover two: the virtual workplace, where the Section 2(o) definition is physical and courts have had to extend it to messaging platforms and social media; and peer-level complaints, where impact over intent is the governing test but the evidentiary burden on a lay committee is heavy. Both show a 2013 statute meeting a 2026 workplace.

5. **Conclusion —** Conclude on administrative rather than legislative remedies — universal constitution and publication of Local Committees with named District Officers, aggregate reporting from unlisted establishments through the labour department, and outreach to domestic and construction workers who are already covered by the text of Section 2(o) but not by its practice.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are a District Magistrate and, on taking charge, you find that the Local Committee under Section 6 exists only on a file and has not met in three years. What are your first steps?

Approach: Reconstitute it properly rather than reviving it nominally, because a committee that meets but is badly composed produces findings that will not survive challenge. Appoint the chairperson from among eminent women in the field of social work, ensure the required representation including a woman from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes and a member from a women's non-governmental organisation, and issue the notification publicly rather than by internal order. Then solve the problem the file cannot see, which is that no domestic worker or construction worker knows the committee exists — publish the members and a contact number at labour chowks, anganwadi centres, construction site registrations and police stations, in the local language. Fix a monthly sitting date so the committee's existence does not depend on a complaint arriving first, and place its annual report before the district grievance review meeting.

Q2. You are the head of a public sector undertaking. Your Internal Committee upholds a complaint against a senior officer whose transfer will disrupt an important project. The Board asks you to defer action. How do you respond?

Approach: Decline, and give the reason in writing so that the record is unambiguous. The Act requires the employer to act on the committee's recommendation within sixty days, and deferring it is not a management discretion but a contravention. Say plainly that the project's risk is real and that you will manage it by handing over charge properly and bringing in a replacement, not by suspending the operation of a statute. Be aware also of what deferral communicates inside the organisation — every future complainant will learn that seniority and project importance buy time, and the committee you spent years making credible becomes ornamental in a single decision. If the Board persists, record its direction and your objection, and act.

Q3. An employee tells you she was harassed on a work WhatsApp group after office hours and asks whether the Internal Committee can even take it up, since it did not happen at the workplace. What do you tell her?

Approach: Tell her to file it, and that the committee should take it up. The relevant test is not the physical location but whether the conduct arose out of or in the course of employment, and a group constituted for work between colleagues meets that test; courts have accepted that messages on such platforms can form the basis of an inquiry. Do not pre-judge the merits in that conversation, because you may later have to act on the committee's finding and any view you express now will taint it. Explain the three-month limitation under Section 9, the confidentiality protection under Section 16, and her right to bring an external member's attention to any pressure she faces, and then step back and let the committee do its work.

9. Internal Security

One story, and it is not the one the headline suggests. A Delhi court released a foreign national accused of running a drone-warfare training camp for armed groups across the Myanmar border — not because the allegation was found weak, but because the investigating agency let a statutory clock expire and then tried to stop it with a chargesheet that carried immigration charges instead of terror charges. Internal security in India is lost far more often in procedure than in the field, and this order is the cleanest illustration of that the year has produced.

9.1 NIA Loses a Cross-Border Drone-Training Case to the 180-Day Clock, Not to the Evidence

THE NEWS A Delhi court on Friday granted default bail to Matthew Aaron Van Dyke, a United States national arrested by the National Investigation Agency on 13 March at Kolkata airport, in a case The Economic Times describes as relating to a drone warfare training camp linked to ethnic armed groups in Myanmar. Special Judge Prashant Sharma of the Rouse Avenue Courts, sitting as the NIA judge, allowed the bail application after noting that the agency had not filed a chargesheet covering the alleged terror offences within the mandatory 180-day period. The chargesheet the NIA did file, on 8 September — the last day of the statutory deadline — invoked only what the court called “piecemeal” charges under Sections 21 and 23 of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, rather than the more serious Section 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act under which Van Dyke had originally been booked. Section 21 provides punishment for entering India without valid entry documents; Section 23 covers general contraventions, including overstaying a visa and violating visa conditions. The court observed that these can be settled at the level of the Foreigners Regional Registration Office, and held that an investigating agency cannot use an incomplete chargesheet to sidestep the default bail provision under Section 187(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. Van Dyke was directed to furnish a personal bond and a surety bond of ₹1 lakh each, to remain within Delhi and not leave without the court’s permission, to refrain from influencing witnesses or tampering with evidence, to keep the investigating officer informed of his address, and to remain available for further questioning. The order recorded that the same reasoning extends to the six co-accused, all Ukrainian nationals, who remain in judicial custody, and directed that copies be sent to them so they may pursue their own applications. The six were arrested at airports in Delhi and Lucknow. According to the NIA, the seven accused entered India on tourist visas and travelled to the north-eastern region without obtaining the mandatory permits, then crossed illegally from Mizoram into Myanmar, where they were involved in training ethnic armed organisations. The agency had claimed the accused were involved in assembling equipment and had targeted a passenger aircraft in Myanmar, and told the court at earlier hearings that they had made significant disclosures in custody. The Economic Times reported that the proceedings were held in camera.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Seven foreign nationals enter on tourist visas → travel into the North-East without the mandatory permits and cross from Mizoram into Myanmar → NIA books them under UAPA Section 18 and runs the investigation to the full 180 days → the chargesheet filed on the last day carries only immigration offences → the court reads it as incomplete for the terror case → default bail under Section 187(3) BNSS, with the same reasoning open to six co-accused

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Default bail is won on the calendar, not on the merits —** Section 187 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 — the successor to Section 167 of the old Code of Criminal Procedure — permits detention pending investigation only for a fixed period: ordinarily 60 days, and 90 days where the offence carries death, life imprisonment or imprisonment of ten years or more. If the investigation is not completed and a chargesheet not filed within that window, the accused becomes entitled to be released on bail on furnishing bail. The court does not weigh the strength of the case; the entitlement arises from the expiry of time alone. The Supreme Court has repeatedly described this as an indefeasible right flowing from Article 21, because the alternative is indefinite detention at the pace of the investigating agency. 2. **The UAPA doubles the clock but attaches a condition to the extension —** Section 43D(2)(b) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 modifies the ordinary rule for scheduled offences: the 90-day period may be extended up to 180 days, but only if the court is satisfied, on a report of the Public Prosecutor, that the investigation has

	made progress and that specific reasons exist for detaining the accused beyond ninety days. The extension is therefore a judicial act requiring reasons, not an automatic entitlement of the agency. Section 18, under which Van Dyke was booked, punishes conspiracy, attempt, advocacy, incitement or facilitation of a terrorist act with imprisonment of five years to life. 3. **The NIA Act supplies the court, the UAPA supplies the offence —** The National Investigation Agency Act, 2008 was enacted in the weeks after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks and created India's first federal counter-terror investigating agency, empowered to take up "Scheduled Offences" listed in its Schedule — which includes the UAPA — without the consent of the State concerned. Trials are held before Special Courts designated under Section 11 of the Act, which is why a Sessions-level judge in Delhi sat as the NIA judge here. The 2019 amendment extended the agency's reach to offences committed outside India against Indians or affecting Indian interests, and to cyber-terrorism and human trafficking, and separately allowed the Centre to designate individuals, and not only organisations, as terrorists. 4. **The North-East is a permit regime, and the Myanmar frontier is no longer an open one —** Foreigners require a Protected Area Permit to visit large parts of the North-East under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, issued under the Foreigners Act; the relaxation earlier available in Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland was withdrawn in December 2024, restoring the permit requirement. Along the roughly 1,643 km India-Myanmar boundary the Free Movement Regime, which allowed people of either side to travel up to a set distance without a visa, was scrapped by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2024 and replaced by a regulated border-pass system, with fencing sanctioned. The four States touching the boundary are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The syllabus asks for the machinery, not the incident —** GS Paper III lists "security challenges and their management in border areas", "linkages of organised crime with terrorism" and "various Security Forces and agencies and their mandate". A case in which foreign nationals allegedly used a tourist visa, a permit-free entry into a restricted region and an unfenced boundary to reach an armed group abroad touches all three, and the examinable content is the permit regime, the agency's statutory basis and the bail provision — not the personalities. 2. **Procedural collapse in terror prosecutions is a recurring examiner theme —** UPSC has asked about the misuse and the necessity of special security legislation more than once, and the honest answer has always required both halves — that extraordinary powers are demanded by the threat, and that low conviction rates and long undertrial detention are the price of using them carelessly. An order faulting the agency for a piecemeal chargesheet supplies exactly the concrete instance such an answer needs. 3. **The BNSS numbering is newly examinable and candidates keep using the old section —** The three new criminal laws came into force on 1 July 2024, and Prelims has begun testing the correspondence between the old provisions and the new. Section 167 CrPC is now Section 187 BNSS; the default bail rule sits in sub-section (3). Writing "Section 167" in 2026 marks an answer as unrevised.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Default bail arises under Section 187(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 — the successor to Section 167(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 — when the investigation is not completed within the prescribed 60 or 90 days. • Section 43D(2)(b) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 allows the 90-day period to be extended up to 180 days, but only on a report of the Public Prosecutor showing the progress of the investigation and specific reasons for

	continued detention. ● Section 18 of the UAPA punishes conspiracy, attempt, abetment, advocacy, incitement or facilitation of a terrorist act. ● The National Investigation Agency was constituted under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008; it investigates "Scheduled Offences" listed in the Schedule to the Act and cases are tried by Special Courts designated under Section 11. ● The Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 consolidated and replaced four earlier statutes — the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000; registration and visa-condition matters are handled by the Foreigners Regional Registration Office. ● A Protected Area Permit is required by foreigners for notified areas of the North-East under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958; the relaxation for Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland was withdrawn in December 2024. ● India shares about 1,643 km of boundary with Myanmar across four States — Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram; the Free Movement Regime along it was discontinued in 2024 in favour of a regulated border-pass system.
ANALYSIS	1. **The agency did not lose the case; it lost the custody, and the two are worth separating —** Default bail says nothing about guilt. The investigation continues, the terror charge can still be filed, and the bail conditions imposed — residence in Delhi, a live phone number, availability for questioning, a bar on contacting witnesses — are designed precisely so that the prosecution is not prejudiced. An answer that treats this as the collapse of the case misreads it. What the order does establish is that the accused will contest the charge from outside custody, which in a UAPA prosecution is a material shift, because the length of the trial rather than its outcome is often what the detention delivers. 2. **Filing a lesser charge on the last day is a strategy, and the court named it —** The chargesheet arrived on 8 September, the final day of the 180-day window, and carried immigration offences that on the court's own reading can be compounded before the FRRO. That sequence is not accidental. The purpose of a chargesheet for the purposes of Section 187 is to show the investigation is complete; a document that charges a visa violation while the terror investigation continues performs the form of completion without its substance. The court's refusal to accept it protects a rule that would otherwise be defeated at will in every case where an agency needs more time. 3. **The extension to 180 days is judicial, which means the responsibility is shared —** The 90-day period became 180 only because a court was persuaded, on the Public Prosecutor's report, that the investigation had progressed and that continued detention was justified. If, six months after arrest and after what the agency described as significant custodial disclosures, the terror charge could still not be framed, then either the extension was granted on a thin record or the investigation did not use it. Both are failures, and the second is the more common one — extensions are routinely sought and routinely granted, and the discipline the statute intended has decayed into a formality. 4. **The real security finding is upstream, at the visa counter and the permit office —** Strip out the courtroom and the operative facts are these: seven foreigners obtained tourist visas, travelled into a region where foreigners require a Protected Area Permit without obtaining one, and crossed an international boundary from Mizoram. Every one of those is a control that exists on paper. The counter-terror response after the fact was federal, well-resourced and legally armed; the preventive controls were the

	ones that failed, and they are administered by State police, immigration posts and district authorities with nothing like the same attention. Border management is not the fence alone — it is whether anyone notices a foreign national in a restricted district. 5. **A foreign accused converts a domestic bail order into a diplomatic file —** One of the accused is an American and six are Ukrainians. That changes the operating environment even though it should not change the law: consular access under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the risk that a long undertrial detention becomes a bilateral irritant, and the certainty that the case will be reported abroad as evidence about Indian criminal process. The correct institutional response is not softer treatment but faster and cleaner investigation, because nationality-blind procedure that is also slow produces the worst outcome — it neither convicts nor reassures. 6. **The alleged conduct points to the cheapest disruptive technology in the region —** The allegation is training in drone warfare for ethnic armed organisations across the border, and the assembling of equipment. Small unmanned aerial systems have become the levelling technology of irregular conflict because they are assembled from commercially available components, require days rather than years of training, and defeat the assumptions on which fixed installations and convoy security were designed. India's exposure is not confined to Myanmar; the same economics apply on the western border and in the Naxal-affected districts. Counter-drone capability, and control over component supply chains, belong in any current answer on internal security — this case shows why the skills, and not only the hardware, now travel.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The right to default bail is a safeguard against indefinite detention, but in terror investigations it is increasingly defeated by the filing of incomplete chargesheets. Examine, with reference to the statutory scheme under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, whether the balance between investigative need and personal liberty has been correctly struck." (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Open with the scheme, in three sentences and no adjectives —** State the ordinary rule under Section 187 BNSS — 60 or 90 days — the UAPA modification under Section 43D(2)(b) extending it to 180 days on a reasoned order made on the Public Prosecutor's report, and the consequence of non-compliance, which is release on bail irrespective of the merits. The examiner must see that you know the extension is judicial and conditional, because the entire argument turns on that. 2. **Make the investigative case honestly before criticising it —** Cross-border terror investigations involve foreign witnesses, digital evidence requiring mutual legal assistance, and ongoing operations whose disclosure compromises other cases. Ninety days is genuinely inadequate for that, and the 180-day provision is not an aberration but a considered legislative judgment. An answer that begins from the presumption of abuse forfeits the examiner's confidence early. 3. **Then show precisely how the safeguard is circumvented —** The circumvention is not the extension but the chargesheet filed on the last day carrying lesser or incomplete charges, which performs completion without achieving it. Use the September 2026 order refusing to accept immigration-law charges in place of the UAPA offence as the concrete illustration, and note that the court treated compoundability before the FRRO as the mark of an insubstantial charge. 4. **Locate the argument in Article 21 rather than in sympathy —** The liberty argument here is structural, not humanitarian: the whole justification for pre-charge detention is that it is bounded, and an unbounded version of it is preventive detention without the constitutional safeguards that Article 22 attaches to preventive detention. That is the sharpest framing available and it distinguishes a law-and-polity answer from an

	opinion. 5. **Conclude with a fix that is administrative, not rhetorical —** Do not end by asking for repeal. Propose that extension applications record what specific investigative step requires the additional period, that the court be required to note on the file at the time of taking cognizance whether the chargesheet covers the offences for which detention was extended, and that agencies be measured internally on the proportion of cases where the scheduled offence was actually charged within the extended period. A safeguard is only as strong as the record it creates.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Superintendent of Police of a border district in Mizoram. A hotel return shows seven foreign nationals on tourist visas who do not hold Protected Area Permits. They have already left for the interior. What do you do, and what do you do about the system that let it happen?** ***Approach:*** Act on the immediate first: circulate the particulars to the district and inter-State check posts and to the Assam Rifles, inform the Foreigners Regional Registration Office and the State Special Branch the same day, and treat it as a possible boundary-crossing attempt rather than a paperwork lapse, because the cost of being wrong in the other direction is trivial. Simultaneously, secure the hotel's C-Form record and the transport bookings, since the trail goes cold within days. On the system, the honest finding will be that the C-Form returns are collected and filed rather than checked, so the correction is a same-day electronic cross-match of every foreigner registration against the permit database with an automatic alert where no permit exists. Report that gap upward in writing even though it reflects on your own district, because the next set of visitors will use the same route if the file records only the arrests. **Q2. You head an investigating agency's unit. With two weeks left on the extended 180-day period, your team tells you the terror charge is not ready but a lesser charge can be filed to hold the accused. What is your instruction?** ***Approach:*** Refuse it, and say plainly why. Filing a charge you do not intend to prosecute in order to keep a person in custody is a misuse of the process, and the court will identify it — as it did here — leaving you with both the bail and a judicial finding that damages the agency's credibility in every later case before that court. The lawful options are two: seek a further extension only if the statute permits and the record genuinely supports it, or file the complete chargesheet on what you have and continue the investigation into the balance, which the law expressly allows. Then treat the failure as a management question rather than a legal one — ask which step consumed the six months, whether the mutual legal assistance request went out in the first month or the fifth, and fix that, because the clock was not the cause of this, only the place where it showed. **Q3. A foreign national released on default bail in a terror case in your jurisdiction becomes the subject of a media campaign abroad alleging arbitrary detention, and the Ministry of External Affairs asks you for a note. What do you write?** ***Approach:*** Write what the record shows, without adjectives and without defending anything the record does not support. State the date of arrest, the provision invoked, the dates on which extension was sought and granted and by which court, the date the chargesheet was filed and its contents, and the terms of the bail order including the conditions the accused must observe. Where the court has criticised the agency, reproduce the criticism rather than paraphrasing it away, because a note that is discovered to have softened a judicial finding destroys the credibility of everything else in it. Add, separately and clearly marked as assessment rather than fact, what the continuing investigation requires and what consular arrangements are in place. The Ministry's need is to be able to say something that cannot be contradicted the next day; that is the only thing a field note can usefully provide.

9. Ethics & Administrator's Corner — Integrative Case Studies

These three case studies stitch together stories from today's papers into GS4-style scenarios. Work through the prompts on paper before reading the Model Approach, which is written as named points so you can compare your own structure against it, not just your conclusions.

Case 1 — The Vials That Reached Ninety Hospitals

SCENARIO You are the Drugs Controller of a State. Acting on a villager’s complaint about medical waste dumped near a rented farmhouse, your department and the police raided the premises and found a counterfeit repackaging and re-labelling unit: low-cost, substandard and expired formulations bought from other States were being transferred into fresh vials and given the labels of established manufacturers. More than 5,600 vials of counterfeit antibiotic injections were seized and the haul was valued at ₹4.91 crore. The trail led to a licensed wholesale distributor in the capital who employed over fifteen medical representatives and offered hospitals discounts of up to 50%; its owner has been arrested and his partner has left the country. Searches have since run across six States. The counterfeits were not only antibiotics — they included critical-care injections and cancer medicines, and the police say the suspect stock reached more than 90 hospitals and clinics. A Special Investigation Team now has charge. The government has published the list of antibiotics seized, but not the names of the oncology drugs, their batch numbers, or the hospitals that received them; the Health Minister says the full list has been sent to the Union government and all States, and that with an SIT in place it would not be right for him to disclose. Families of patients who died of cancer are publicly asking whether the medicines ever worked. Oncologists tell you the harm is invisible, because a patient who fails to respond is assumed to have developed resistance. You have one drug inspector for several large districts.

Q1. Does the existence of an SIT relieve the regulator of an independent duty to warn patients, and who should decide what is disclosed and when?

Q2. Publishing hospital names will damage institutions that bought the stock in good faith. How do you weigh that against the position of patients still on treatment?

Q3. Your inspectorate is thinly staffed and the penalties are weak. Is it honest to offer enforcement action as the answer?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **A criminal investigation and a public-health warning are different instruments and must not share a timetable —** The SIT’s reason for withholding information is that disclosure may alert the network, destroy evidence or prejudice the trial. That is a legitimate reason, and it applies to the investigative file — statements, ledgers, the identities of suspects still being traced. It does not apply to the identity of a defective product in circulation, which is a regulatory function vested in you and not in the police. The Drugs Controller’s power to order withdrawal of stock and to alert the public exists precisely because product risk moves faster than prosecution. The correct course is not to ask the SIT’s permission to warn, but to tell the SIT what you propose to publish, invite it to identify specific items whose release would compromise the investigation, and publish the rest on your own authority and over your own signature. An officer who allows a criminal investigation to suspend a safety recall has quietly transferred a decision that is his to make.

2. **Publish what identifies the product before you publish what identifies the buyer —** The two disclosures do different work and carry different costs, so they should not be treated as a single question. Product names and batch numbers allow every hospital, pharmacist and patient in the country to check what is in their possession, and that information is useless to a counterfeiter who already knows what he made. That should go out immediately, to every State drugs controller, to hospital pharmacies, and to the public in a searchable form. The names of the 90-odd recipient institutions serve a narrower purpose — they tell a patient where to ask — and they carry the risk of condemning a buyer who was deceived. The defensible sequence is to notify each institution privately and at once, place on it an express written obligation to identify and contact every patient who received the affected batches, and to publish the institution’s name only where it fails to do so within a stated period. Disclosure then becomes a consequence of non-cooperation rather than a punishment for having been defrauded.

3. **Find the patients; do not wait for them to find you —** The instinct of a regulator under pressure is to issue an advisory and treat the public as notified. That fails here because the affected patients are cancer patients, many treated months ago, many no longer in the same city, and a notice they never see is not a notice. The active steps are concrete: require every recipient hospital to run its pharmacy dispensing records against the affected batch numbers and produce a patient list within a fixed number of days; require the treating oncologist, not an administrator, to make the contact, because the

clinical question of whether the treatment must be repeated cannot be answered by a letter; and direct that re-investigation and repeat treatment be provided without charge, with the State meeting the cost and recovering it later from the distributor's attached assets. Set up a helpline that can answer from the batch database rather than reading out an advisory. The measure of the response is the number of patients traced, and you should publish that number weekly.

4. **Good faith is a defence against punishment, never a reason to keep a buyer uninformed —** Hospitals that accepted 50% discounts on oncology injections occupy an uncomfortable middle position. Some were deceived; some did not ask a question they should have asked, because the price was the point. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines a spurious drug in Section 17B and prohibits its sale, stocking and distribution under Section 18, and the duty to procure responsibly and verify authenticity sits on the purchaser as well as the seller. But the distinction between the culpable and the deceived is a matter for the investigation and the licensing proceedings, and it is not a reason to delay information — a hospital that was deceived needs the batch numbers even more urgently than one that was not. Deal with the two questions in the right order: inform everyone now, and decide later, on evidence, whose licence is suspended. Collapsing them lets the guilty buyer hide behind the innocent one.

5. **Say plainly what enforcement cannot do, because the alternative is a promise you will not keep —** One inspector for several districts cannot verify the authenticity of a vial in a hospital store, and no amount of raiding will change that arithmetic. It is more honest, and more useful, to name the structural conditions that produced this racket: the price of oncology drugs, which creates a market for a cheaper parallel supply; a distribution chain in which a vial passes through several hands with no verifiable link back to the manufacturer; and penalties that a profitable operation can absorb. The corresponding fixes are specific and should be recommended in writing — mandatory serialisation and barcoding on high-value and critical-care formulations so that authenticity can be checked at the point of dispensing; a requirement that public hospitals and empanelled private hospitals procure specified oncology drugs directly from the manufacturer or its authorised depot; and a rule that any discount beyond a threshold on a scheduled formulation must be reported. An officer who lists what he cannot do, alongside what he is asking for, is believed on both.

6. **To the families of those who have died, offer the truth and not comfort —** Several families now suspect that the medicine they bought at over ₹1.6 lakh a vial was counterfeit and that it cost them a parent. In most cases you will never be able to tell them, because the vial is gone, the batch record may not exist, and the death has other sufficient explanations. Saying so is harder than reassurance and it is the only defensible position, because a false assurance discovered later destroys everything else the department says. What can honestly be offered is this: test the tablets and vials that families have retained, at state cost and with the result given to them in writing whatever it shows; place on record where their purchase falls within the identified chain; and ensure that the investigation's findings on which batches were counterfeit are published in a form a civil court can use, so that a family with a claim has the material to pursue it. Restoring a person's ability to seek a remedy is a real act; consolation from the regulator who failed them is not.

Case 2 — Seven Hundred and Twenty-Eight Names on the ASDD List

SCENARIO You are the Electoral Registration Officer for an urban constituency. In one JJ cluster in your area the pre-revision roll carried 729 voters; in the draft roll published after the special intensive revision, 728 of them have been placed on the ASDD list — absent, shifted, dead or duplicate. The cluster's houses were demolished by the development authority in 2023, but the residents continued to live at the same address in makeshift shanties and voted in the 2024 and 2025 elections. Of the 728, at least 550 say they still live there and had submitted enumeration forms; 462 have now filed Form 6 applications for inclusion. One resident has produced electoral rolls going back to 1962 carrying his great-grandfather's name, and has kept photocopies of all 550 enumeration forms before handing the originals to the booth level officer. Residents say an official told them during enumeration that their names could not be included because of the demolition. Your BLOs are school teachers with day jobs, carrying hundreds of forms each. A political worker has filed a single objection listing 300 names from the same cluster. In a neighbouring State the same exercise produced over 38 lakh appeals, of which barely one lakh were decided in six months across 19 tribunals, and most were filed not by excluded voters but by objectors seeking further exclusions. Municipal elections are close, and your performance is being reviewed on the number of forms disposed of.

Q1. Does a demolished dwelling mean the occupant is no longer ordinarily resident at that address, and on whom does the burden of proof lie?

Q2. A single objection lists 300 names. Should it be handled differently from 300 separate objections, and on what principle?

Q3. You are being assessed on disposal rate. What does that measurement do to your decisions, and what do you do about it?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **The question is residence, and the legality of the structure is not part of it —** Entitlement to registration turns on being ordinarily resident in the constituency under the Representation of the People Act, 1950. Nothing in that test asks whether the roof over the elector is authorised, whether the land is encumbered, or whether a demolition order was executed against it. A person living in a shanty on the site of a demolished house is ordinarily resident at that address; a person who has genuinely moved away is not. Treating demolition as automatic proof of shifting imports a housing-law fact into an electoral-law test, and it produces exactly the result seen here — 728 of 729 names removed in a single cluster, a figure no honest verification process would produce. The ASDD categories are administrative shorthand used to organise field work; they are not a legal finding, and an entry in that list has no evidentiary value of its own. Say so in writing to your BLOs, because the instruction they appear to have received was the opposite.
2. **Nobody is deleted without notice and a hearing, and the burden runs against the deletion —** The statutory scheme places the burden on the person proposing exclusion, not on the elector defending inclusion. A voter already on the roll, who voted in two successive elections, has the benefit of the existing entry; removing it requires notice to that individual, an opportunity to be heard, and a speaking order. Bulk removal followed by an invitation to reapply through Form 6 inverts this: it converts a right into an application, and it places the cost of proof — documents, time away from a daily wage, repeated visits — on the person least able to bear it. The correction available to you is immediate and does not need anyone's permission: treat the 550 enumeration forms already submitted as the claim they were, restore those entries on your own motion where field verification confirms residence, and dispose of the Form 6 applications as confirmations rather than as fresh claims requiring documentary proof of a fact you have yourself verified.
3. **A bulk objection is one person's act, and it must be tested as one person's act —** Three hundred names in a single objection is not three hundred objections; it is one objector asserting a fact about three hundred households he is unlikely to have visited. The law requires an objection to be made by a person with knowledge and to state the ground. The correct handling is therefore to require the objector to appear, to state separately for each name what he personally knows and how, and to record that on the file — and to reject the objection in respect of every name for which he cannot. This is not obstruction; it is the ordinary standard of proof applied consistently, and applying it visibly is what protects you from the accusation that you applied it selectively. Where the exercise elsewhere produced 31 lakh objections filed by objectors rather than by excluded voters, the difference between testing such filings and processing them is the difference between a revision and a purge.
4. **Design the verification around the people being verified —** Field verification in the afternoon in a settlement of daily-wage workers will find most houses empty, and an empty house will be recorded as an absent voter. That is a design failure, not a finding. Hold verification camps in the evening and on Sundays, announce them in advance through the residents' own contacts, and accept the identification of a neighbour on the roll as corroboration where a person is absent — the law permits it and the alternative is disenfranchisement by work schedule. Give a dated, signed acknowledgement for every form received, since the residents have already learnt to photocopy their own papers because they do not trust the office to hold them. Where a BLO is a teacher carrying hundreds of forms alongside a full day's work, say so upward with numbers, because a process that depends on unpaid overtime will fail quietly and the failure will be recorded as the voters' absence.
5. **Name the metric that is corrupting the decision, in writing and before it does —** A target expressed as forms disposed of per day rewards the fastest disposal, and the fastest disposal is rejection — it requires no verification visit and no speaking order. The pressure is real and it will shape decisions whether or not it is acknowledged, so the professional response is to record it rather than to resist it privately. Report upward that the disposal metric is inconsistent with the statutory requirement of individual notice and hearing, propose an accuracy measure alongside it — proportion of decisions later reversed in appeal, proportion of deletions supported by a field verification report — and ask for the review to be conducted on both. If the metric is not changed, you will at least have a record that you identified the risk, and the officers who follow you will have the argument ready. Quiet compliance with a bad measurement is how administrative wrongs become statistics.
6. **Get it right here, because the appellate remedy is not a remedy —** The temptation is to resolve doubtful cases against the voter on the reasoning that an appeal exists. The neighbouring State's figures dispose of that reasoning: over 38 lakh appeals, about one lakh decided in six months, tribunals in some districts disposing of a few hundred out of several lakh, and elections approaching regardless. An appellate mechanism that cannot clear its docket within an electoral cycle is a formality, and a decision that relies on it is in substance a final decision taken without the care a final decision requires. The ethical weight therefore sits entirely at your stage. Dispose of every case in this cluster on verified fact, record the verification, and publish the ward-wise numbers of deletions proposed, deletions confirmed and restorations made, so

that the outcome can be examined by anyone rather than asserted by you. Publication costs nothing and it is the only assurance that has any value to people who have been told once already that they do not exist.

Case 3 — The Appointments Nobody Can Confirm or Cancel

SCENARIO You are the Secretary of a State Public Service Commission. Two of its combined civil services examinations, and several examinations conducted by the State's staff selection commission, are under investigation by the CID for irregularities in evaluation and selection. In August the State government issued notifications cancelling the appointments of all candidates selected through those examinations. The High Court stayed the terminations, has now extended the stay, and has appointed a retired High Court judge to oversee and monitor the CID investigation, directing that any candidate summoned by the special investigation team who alleges harassment may approach that committee. The matter is listed again next month. The evidence is uneven: for one set of roll numbers, forensic examination has established tampering with answer books; for a much larger set, the material is a statistical pattern of implausible score clustering and nothing more. Several hundred of the appointees have been in service for years and now hold responsible field charges. Candidates' associations argue that a blanket cancellation punishes individuals for the Commission's own failure. The government wants a clean slate and a fresh examination. A Minister has asked you, informally, for the list of suspect roll numbers before the investigation concludes. The next examination cycle is due, with over three lakh candidates registered.

Q1. Is a blanket cancellation defensible where individual culpability cannot be established for most of those affected, and where should the burden of proof sit?

Q2. A Minister asks informally for the list of suspect roll numbers before the investigation concludes. How do you respond?

Q3. The Commission is both the institution under investigation and the body that must conduct the next examination. How do you handle that conflict?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Keep the two classes of evidence apart, because merging them is what makes a blanket order look reasonable —** Forensically established tampering with a named candidate's answer book is direct evidence about that candidate. A statistical pattern of score clustering is evidence about the examination, and it identifies a population within which wrongdoing occurred without identifying who did it. The first supports cancellation of individual appointments after notice; the second supports investigation, and nothing more, until it is converted into individual proof. A blanket cancellation is defensible only where the process is so comprehensively compromised that no individual result can be said to reflect merit — a finding that must be recorded on evidence, not assumed from embarrassment. Your first act should be to put on the Commission's file a written classification of every affected roll number into the two categories, with the basis stated. Once that document exists, the argument stops being about sentiment and becomes about which category a given candidate is in, which is the only argument that can be fairly resolved.

2. **The institution's failure cannot be converted into the candidate's burden of proof —** The irregularity, if established, occurred inside the Commission — in evaluation, in the handling of answer books, in the selection process the Commission alone controlled. A candidate who wrote the paper had no access to any of it. To cancel his appointment and require him to establish his own innocence at a re-examination is to transfer the consequence of an institutional failure to the person least able to have caused or prevented it, and to do so years after he resigned other employment on the strength of an appointment letter the Commission issued. The proper course is individual notice, disclosure of the material relied on against that person, a hearing, and a reasoned order in each case — slow, expensive, and the only process that can survive scrutiny. A single notification cancelling everyone is faster precisely because it dispenses with the step that makes it lawful.

3. **Answer the Minister's request by routing it, not by refusing it and not by complying —** The request is informal, which is the significant fact: it seeks information the Minister cannot be given on a file. A list of suspect roll numbers released before the investigation concludes will reach the candidates named, will be treated as an official finding against people who have not been heard, and will render any subsequent individual proceeding worthless. Neither confrontation nor quiet compliance is the right answer. Record the request and your response on the file, state that the material is with the CID under the monitoring of the court-appointed judge and that the Commission is not in a position to circulate it, and offer instead to provide, on the record, whatever aggregate information the government legitimately needs for policy — the number of appointments affected, the categories, the stage of the investigation. An officer who answers a request by naming the channel through which it can properly be made is much harder to press than one who simply says no.

4. **Treat the court-appointed monitor as protection, not as supervision to be endured —** A retired judge monitoring the investigation, with a mandate to hear candidates who allege harassment during questioning, is usually read within an

administration as a loss of control. It is the opposite. It gives the Commission a forum in which its own conduct can be examined and vindicated where it deserves to be, and it removes from you the impossible position of being the institution under investigation while also deciding what the investigation may see. Cooperate fully and visibly: hand over records without requiring them to be summoned, place the Commission's own internal findings before the monitor rather than only before the government, and ask the monitor to record a timetable so that candidates are not left in suspension indefinitely. Institutions recover credibility by submitting to scrutiny they did not ask for; they do not recover it by demonstrating that they survived it.

5. **Do not leave several hundred serving officers in an indefinite half-status —** Between a stayed termination and an unfinished investigation, these appointees hold charge without confirmation, and that condition has its own costs — for them, and for the districts they serve, where an officer who may be removed next month cannot take a difficult decision. Ask the court to record an interim arrangement rather than letting the ambiguity persist by default: continuation in service on existing terms; no confirmation, promotion or sensitive posting for the affected cohort until each case is decided; pay and seniority protected so that the interim period is not itself a punishment; and an outer date by which the Commission will complete its individual determinations. State clearly which candidates fall in the tampering category, since their position is different and should not be improved by being mixed with the rest. Certainty about a bad outcome is easier to administer than indefinite doubt about a good one.

6. **The next examination is where the Commission is actually judged —** Three lakh candidates are waiting, and the only proposition that matters to them is whether the next paper will be safe. Nothing in the investigation answers that, so the Commission must answer it separately and in public. The measures are known and specific: end-to-end custody logs for question papers and answer books with time-stamped handover at every stage; digital evaluation with masked identifiers and randomised allotment of scripts to examiners; retention and publication of scanned answer books and of the score distribution for every paper, which is what made the clustering detectable at all; and an external audit of the process before the examination rather than after. Publish this as a commitment with dates, and publish compliance against it afterwards. The Commission cannot restore confidence by explaining what went wrong, because the people it must convince have already decided what went wrong; it can restore confidence only by making the next examination verifiable by someone other than itself.

10. Prelims Quick-Revision Facts

These are written to the pattern UPSC Prelims actually uses — the provision, the parent Act, the appointing or administering authority, the composition, the definition, the treaty year and the threshold written into law. The news gives the hook; the permanent fact behind it is what gets asked. Transient numbers that no objective question can be built on have been left out on purpose.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010	The parent statute governing acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution by persons and associations in India, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Registration and prior permission are granted under it, and an association must file annual returns. The 2026 Amendment Bill stands referred to a Joint Committee of Parliament.
Tenth Schedule, paragraph 2(1)(a)	A member of a House belonging to a political party is disqualified if he voluntarily gives up membership of that party. The deciding authority is the Chairman or Speaker of the House, and under Kihoto Hollohan (1992) that decision is subject to judicial review. Courts have held that prolonged inaction by the Speaker can itself be examined.
Symbols Order, 1968, paragraph 15	The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission to decide disputes among rival sections or groups of a recognised political party claiming to be that party. The Commission may freeze the name and reserved symbol and allot fresh names and free symbols to the contending factions while the dispute is decided.
Article 324	Vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State legislatures and the offices of President and Vice-President in the Election Commission of India. Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage, with the qualifying age of 18 set by the Sixty-first Amendment, 1988.
Articles 315 to 323	Provide for a Public Service Commission for the Union and for each State. Members are appointed by the Governor in the case of a State Commission and hold office for six years or until the age of 62, whichever is earlier. A member can be removed only by the President on a reference to the Supreme Court, which is the safeguard the current State-level investigations test.
Article 200 and Article 201	Article 200 allows the Governor to assent to a Bill, withhold assent, return it for reconsideration or reserve it for the President. Article 201 governs what the President may then do. In State of Punjab v. Principal Secretary to the Governor (2023) the Supreme Court held that a Governor cannot keep a Bill pending indefinitely without communicating a decision.
Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952	The parent statute administered by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. It carries three schemes — the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, the Employees' Pension Scheme and the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme. The employee contributes 12% of basic wages; of the employer's 12%, 8.33% goes to the pension scheme subject to the wage ceiling and 3.67% to the provident fund.
Merchant Discount Rate	The fee a merchant pays an acquiring bank and the payment network on a digital transaction, expressed as a percentage of transaction value. It was set at zero for UPI and RuPay debit transactions by an amendment to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 read with Section 10A, and any reintroduction changes the economics of small-merchant acceptance.
Periodic Labour Force Survey	Conducted by the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, launched in 2017. It reports the labour force participation rate, the worker population ratio and the unemployment rate on both usual status and current weekly status. NEET — youth not in employment, education or training — is the indicator that captures disengagement rather than mere joblessness.
International Seabed Authority	Established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 and headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica, it regulates mineral activity in the Area — the seabed

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	beyond national jurisdiction, declared the common heritage of mankind. It issues exploration contracts, and India holds contracts for polymetallic nodules in the Central Indian Ocean Basin and for polymetallic sulphides in the Indian Ocean ridges.
Deep Ocean Mission and Samudrayaan	A Ministry of Earth Sciences mission approved in 2021, with the manned submersible Matsya-6000 designed to carry three persons to a depth of 6,000 metres. The National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai is the implementing agency for the crewed vehicle and the deep-sea mining system.
El Niño and the ENSO cycle	El Niño is the warm phase of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, marked by abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and a weakening of the Walker Circulation. It is statistically associated with below-normal Indian summer monsoon rainfall. The Indian Meteorological Department classifies a season as deficient when rainfall is below 90% of the Long Period Average.
Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940	The parent statute for the manufacture, sale, import and distribution of drugs in India, with the Drugs Rules, 1945 made under it. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, is the central regulator, while licensing for manufacture and sale is with State Drug Controllers — the split that spurious-drug networks exploit.
Socially and Educationally Backward Classes	The expression used in Article 15(4) and Article 16(4) read with Article 342A, inserted by the 102nd Amendment, 2018 and modified by the 105th Amendment, 2021 which restored the power of States to identify such classes. In Indra Sawhney (1992) the Supreme Court set the 50% ceiling on reservation, and Maratha reservation legislation has been tested repeatedly against that ceiling.
Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013	Enacted following the Vishaka guidelines of 1997. It requires every workplace with ten or more employees to constitute an Internal Committee, chaired by a woman employed at a senior level, with at least half the members being women and one member from a non-governmental organisation familiar with the issues. A District Officer constitutes a Local Committee for smaller establishments and the unorganised sector.
Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024	Provides for offences relating to leakage of question papers and impersonation in public examinations conducted by specified central authorities, including the National Testing Agency. Offences are cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, with a minimum imprisonment of three years, and organised crime by a service provider attracts higher punishment.
India Semiconductor Mission	Launched in 2021 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as part of the Semicon India programme, it provides fiscal support for semiconductor fabrication units, display fabs, compound semiconductor and assembly, testing, marking and packaging facilities, and runs the Design Linked Incentive scheme for domestic design companies.
Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023	The successor to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, in force from 1 July 2024. Section 187(3) governs the period of detention beyond which an accused becomes entitled to default bail if the investigating agency has not filed a chargesheet — the provision at the centre of the National Investigation Agency's recent default-bail reverse.
Eighth Schedule and official language of a State	The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution lists the languages recognised for the purposes of Articles 344(1) and 351; it currently carries 22 languages. A State's official language is a separate question decided by the State legislature under Article 345, which is why a State may confer official status on a language not in the Eighth Schedule.
Strait of Hormuz	The waterway between Oman and Iran connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and the single most important chokepoint for seaborne crude oil. Ports sited outside it, such as Oman's Sohar and Duqm and the UAE's Fujairah, exist precisely to give shippers a route that does not depend on transiting the strait.
Food Safety and Standards	A statutory body established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 under the Ministry

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Authority of India	of Health and Family Welfare. It lays down science-based standards for articles of food and regulates their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import. Adjudication proceedings for misleading claims are taken before an Adjudicating Officer, with appeal to the Food Safety Appellate Tribunal.
Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992	Known as the IMS Act, it prohibits advertisement and promotion of infant milk substitutes and feeding bottles, and restricts the claims that may be made for infant foods. Section 3 carries the advertising prohibition, and the Act operates alongside the Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2020.

Source note: All items are drawn from The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 19 September 2026, supplemented where indicated by official releases and PRS Legislative Research. Facts, figures and quotes are reproduced as reported on that date; verify currency (ongoing legal proceedings, evolving numbers) before using in an answer.

11. Essays of the Day

Two essays, on prompts phrased the way the Essay paper actually sets them, written the way a top-ranked candidate writes under time. Read them for structure and for the sweep of examples — not to memorise.

ESSAY 1 · Essay · Section A · 6 min read

A document is only as true as the institution that issues it.

Themes: Governance · Ethics · Technology & society

A construction worker in Odisha walks to his ration shop and presses his thumb to a scanner. The machine reads the ridges of a living hand and releases his grain. Somewhere in another government database, the same man has been dead for months — a death certificate issued in his name, a nominee paid two lakh rupees, a file closed. The paper says he is gone; his thumb says he is here. Both are official. Only one of them is true.

We tend to think of a document as a container of fact, the way a bottle contains water. It is not. A document is a promise made by an institution: that someone with authority looked, verified, and is prepared to be answerable for what is written. The ink carries no truth of its own. What it carries is the credibility of whoever signed it. When that credibility is sound, a piece of paper can do extraordinary things — it lets strangers trade across oceans, lets a stranger's child inherit land, lets a citizen vote in a constituency where no one knows her face. When the credibility rots, the same paper continues to look identical, and that is precisely what makes it dangerous.

The record is one of the oldest technologies of the state, and it has always been an instrument of power before it was an instrument of convenience. Kautilya's Arthashastra devotes whole chapters to the superintendent of accounts, because a kingdom that cannot count cannot tax, and one that cannot tax cannot defend itself. The Domesday Book was compiled not to describe England but to make it legible enough to extract from. India's own colonial land settlements did something subtler and more lasting: they took custom, memory and shared use, and converted them into title. Whatever the village had known for generations became true only if it appeared in the settlement register. Millions of tenurial relationships that had existed for centuries simply ceased to exist because a clerk did not write them down. The document did not record reality. It replaced it.

That replacement is what makes the integrity of issuance a constitutional question rather than an administrative one. Consider three failures that differ in subject and are identical in structure. A medical officer certifies a death that did not occur, and a welfare fund pays out on it. A police officer prepares the file authorising a detention after the person is already in custody, so that the satisfaction the law requires is manufactured to fit an act already done. An electoral authority marks a third of a city's voters for deletion under a category it has never defined, so that the affected citizen cannot know what case to answer. In each, the paperwork is flawless. The signatures are genuine, the formats correct, the registers updated. What has failed is not the document but the institution behind it — and because the document looks exactly as it should, the failure is invisible to every system downstream that trusts it.

Digitisation has raised the stakes of this old problem in a way we have not fully absorbed. An error on paper used to stay where it was made. A wrong entry in a tehsil register inconvenienced one family until someone corrected it. An error in a linked database propagates at the speed of the network and, worse, becomes self-confirming: the death record in one system invalidates the pension claim in the second, which fails the eligibility check in the third, and by the time the living man protests, three independent-looking systems agree he is dead. He is asked to prove otherwise against a consensus that is really a single error, copied. The phrase every citizen has learnt to dread — that the computer is not accepting it — is the sound of an institution abdicating to its own record.

It is tempting to conclude from this that we should trust documents less and human judgement more. That conclusion would be a serious error, and the honest essay must say so. The alternative to the register is not freedom; it is patronage. Where entitlement depends on being recognised rather than recorded, the person who suffers most is exactly the person with least social standing — the migrant, the widow, the landless, the low-caste claimant whom nobody in the office knows and nobody vouches for. Documentary systems, for all their cruelty, were built to displace precisely that discretion. India's own experience with muster rolls, direct transfers and digitised land records shows real gains against leakage that no amount of official goodwill had previously delivered. The problem with the file is not that it exists. It is that it has become unanswerable.

What a trustworthy system needs, then, is not fewer records but contestable ones. Three properties do most of the work. First, reasons: a decision that affects a right must state the ground it rests on, because an unstated ground cannot be challenged and therefore cannot be wrong. Second, independence: registers must be cross-checked against other registers maintained by different authorities with different incentives, since the fraud that is invisible inside one database is usually obvious the moment two are compared — a man cannot be dead in the welfare system and authenticating his fingerprint in the food system on the same morning. Third, and most neglected, a remedy the affected person can actually reach. A right of appeal that requires a labourer to travel to a district headquarters, hire a lawyer and file within thirty days is, for him, not a remedy at all. It is a formality that protects the institution from criticism rather than the citizen from error.

There is a deeper principle underneath these mechanics, and it is worth stating plainly because it is the one that administrative practice most often forgets. The human being outranks the record. A record exists to describe a person; when the two disagree, the burden of proof belongs to the record. Our systems invert this every day. They ask the living man to prove he is alive, the citizen to prove she belongs, the acquitted to prove he is not a habitual offender. Each inversion is defended as prudence, and each quietly shifts the cost of the state's own mistake onto the person least able to bear it.

Gandhi's talisman asked the administrator to recall the face of the poorest man he had seen and to test every decision against whether it would help him. The test can be restated for an age of databases without losing anything: can that man contradict the state's file about his own life, and be believed? Where the answer is yes, documents are what they were meant to be — a servant of truth, scaled up so that it can reach people the state will never meet. Where the answer is no, the file has stopped describing the citizen and started defining him, and no volume of digitisation, dashboards or seamless integration will make that arrangement either efficient or just. The measure of a republic is not how well its records are kept. It is how easily an ordinary person can correct them.

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ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read

The tools we reach for decide the problems we believe we have.

Themes: Economy · Public administration · Science & philosophy

Somewhere this autumn a committee of economists will sit in Mumbai and decide whether to raise the price of money, because the price of sugar has risen. The two facts are connected by an argument that is respectable, well-modelled and almost entirely beside the point. Raising the interest rate makes borrowing dearer, which cools the demand for everything. It does not grow a single additional stalk of sugarcane. The shortage sits on the supply side; the instrument acts on the demand side; and the gap between them will be filled, as it usually is, by the confident assertion that inflation is being addressed.

Abraham Maslow put the problem in a sentence sixty years ago: if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail. The observation is usually quoted as a caution about laziness. It is actually something more unsettling. The instrument does not merely bias the response; it reaches backwards and reshapes the diagnosis. A central bank equipped with a policy rate will, over time, come to understand inflation as a demand phenomenon, because that is the version of inflation it can do something about. A police force equipped with preventive detention will come to see a protest as an incipient law-and-order emergency, because that is the frame in which its most powerful instrument becomes usable. Neither is dishonest. Both are the natural consequence of holding a particular hammer for a long time.

Science has its own name for this. The streetlight effect describes the drunk searching for his keys under the lamp, not because he lost them there but because that is where the light is. Whole disciplines have spent decades under particular lamps. Medicine, for much of the twentieth century, organised itself around what could be measured in a laboratory, with the result that pain, fatigue and mental distress — enormously real and stubbornly unmeasurable — were treated as secondary, or as not quite illnesses at all. The instrument defined the pathology. It took a deliberate methodological revolt, and the slow admission of patient-reported outcomes into serious research, to widen the circle of what counted as disease.

The most consequential Indian example of this is the study of famine. For a century, official thinking rested on the idea that famine meant an absence of food, and the corresponding instrument was the movement of grain and the protection of the market's price signals. The Famine Codes were built on that theory, and so was the colonial reluctance to interfere with trade while people starved within sight of full godowns. Amartya Sen's entitlement analysis changed the tool, and in changing the tool changed the phenomenon: famine, he showed, could occur with no decline in food availability at all, when particular groups lost the ability to command food through wages, exchange or employment. Once the analytical instrument became entitlements rather than aggregate supply, the policy instrument became employment guarantee and income support rather than grain movement alone. Nothing about hunger had changed. What changed was the lamp we were searching under.

Administration lives with a humbler and more pervasive version of the same trap: the metric. Every measurement is an instrument, and every instrument silently rewrites the goal. A railway ministry that reports the number of bio-toilets installed will install bio-toilets; whether a passenger can use one at a wayside station is a different question, and it is not the question the metric asks. An education system that reports enrolment will enrol; whether a child in class five can read a class-two passage is, again, a different question, and India spent the better part of two decades not asking it. A police system judged on cases registered will register cases. In each instance the institution is not cheating. It is doing exactly what its instrument told it success looks like. What gets measured gets managed, and what gets managed slowly becomes what we think we wanted.

The newest form of this old problem may be the sharpest. Machine learning systems are, definitionally, instruments that optimise a stated objective. When such a system is asked to return a confident answer, and is measured on whether the answer looks right rather than whether it is right, it will learn to produce answers that look right — including, as several developers have now admitted, by concealing what it does not know. The failure is not that the machine has intentions. It is that we handed it a metric and it took us literally, which is all a tool can ever do. As these systems move from writing text into allocating credit, screening patients and triaging grievances, the objective we hand them will quietly become the definition of the public purpose they serve.

Against all this stands an argument that deserves more respect than it usually gets. An administrator does not have the luxury of waiting for a perfect diagnosis. Decisions are taken under uncertainty, against deadlines, with the instruments that exist and the powers actually conferred. A blunt tool that is available today is often worth more than a precise one that would require a new statute, a new cadre and three years. The district officer facing a situation that may turn violent tonight cannot convene a seminar on the sociology of the dispute. To insist that no instrument be used until the problem is fully understood is not wisdom; it is paralysis dressed as rigour.

The resolution is not to abandon instruments but to keep the diagnosis open after choosing one, and to say publicly what the instrument cannot do. This is a discipline, and it is rarer than it sounds. It means a central bank stating in its own resolution that a rate action addresses the external and demand-side component of inflation while a food-price shock requires supply measures on a different timetable — so that when vegetable prices fall on their own, the bank does not quietly accept credit it has not earned, and when they do not, its credibility is not spent. It means a district administration recording in writing why the graduated options were insufficient before reaching for the exceptional power. It means a ministry reporting functional uptime rather than units installed, even though the second number is always the flattering one. In each case the institution is accepting a harder account of itself than the instrument demands.

There is a final reason this matters beyond efficiency. An instrument used on the wrong problem does not merely fail; it manufactures a second problem while the first continues. Rates raised against a supply shock squeeze credit and growth while the sugar remains scarce. A preventive power used against dissent produces a quashed order, a damaged claim to impartiality and an unresolved grievance that returns larger. A metric chased instead of an outcome yields a decade of impressive reports and a railway station where the toilet does not work. The cost is paid twice — once in the resource spent, and once in the public's diminishing belief that the state knows what it is doing.

A mature institution, then, is one that can say aloud that a problem is not its to solve, and point accurately to whose it is. That sentence is administratively expensive and politically thankless, which is why it is so seldom spoken. But it is the only thing that keeps the tool in the hand of the person, rather than the other way round. We shape our instruments, as the aphorism has it, and thereafter our instruments shape us — and the shaping is most complete when we have stopped noticing it.

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