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

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The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 21 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 · 21 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, my man.

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

Index

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

Three stories, one lesson: in Indian governance the rule is rarely the problem, the machinery that applies it is. A software flag put a sitting Election Commissioner and a dead economist on the same notice list; a Cabinet decision on Tulu cannot take effect until a 1963 Act is amended; and a party's charter-flight bills have become a money-laundering file because India regulates candidate spending but barely watches party spending. Read each card for the gap between the power and the procedure.

1.1 Delhi SIR Notices Reach an Election Commissioner, L.K. Advani, S. Jaishankar and a Dead Economist

THE NEWS New Delhi. The special intensive revision (SIR) of Delhi's electoral roll — a fresh, house-to-house re-verification of every elector rather than the usual annual update — has generated notices against some of the most prominent names in the capital. The Election Commission published Delhi's draft roll on August 31 after weeding out 47.56 lakh electors declared absent, shifted, dead or duplicate (The Indian Express). The EC's centralised portal, ECINET, then began flagging electors in two categories: "no mapping", where an elector cannot be linked to the roll of the last intensive revision (2002 in Delhi), and "logical discrepancies", where current details differ from the old roll. The Hindu puts the number of electors facing notices at 33.1 lakh and The Economic Times at 33.13 lakh; The Indian Express reports 31.63 lakh. Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, was flagged for a "self-name mismatch" in the Delhi Cantonment constituency; the constituency's Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) said on Sunday that his entry had since been validated after "details, facts and documents" were verified. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his wife, L.K. Advani and two family members, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, former Chief Election Commissioners Sushil Chandra and Arun Goel, and CBI Director Praveen Sood were flagged for "no mapping"; Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia are also on the list. Comptroller and Auditor General K. Sanjay Murthy faces a notice for "parent name mismatch". Economist Bibek Debroy, former chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council who died in November 2024 aged 69, appears as a 70-year-old elector flagged for no mapping, The Hindu found. At two New Moti Bagh booths alone, 594 electors — largely senior serving and retired bureaucrats — received notices. The Delhi Chief Electoral Officer said a notice "does not mean" deletion and that no name can be removed without a hearing and "a proper, speaking, and appealable order". Claims and objections close on October 30; the final roll is due on November 4. The Congress's Jairam Ramesh said two SIR phases (Bihar from June 2025, then nine States and three Union Territories from November 2025) deleted 7.8 crore names, 13% of the pre-SIR roll, and that 5.43 crore more electors have been served notices; he put the share of Delhi voters facing deletion risk at 53.73%. The syllabus link is direct: Articles 324-326 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Roll last intensively revised around 2002 → SIR mandates linkage of every elector to that old roll → centralised software flags every unmatched or mismatched entry → 33 lakh notices in Delhi, including an EC member and a dead man → burden of proof shifts to the elector before an ERO hearing

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Three Articles build the franchise, and Article 325 is the anti-exclusion clause —** Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections in the Election Commission. Article 325 provides one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and bars exclusion from it on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them. Article 326 guarantees adult suffrage to every citizen aged 18 or above who is not otherwise disqualified; the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 by the 61st Amendment, 1988. Citizenship, age and ordinary residence are therefore the three conditions an ERO actually tests. 2. **The RPA, 1950 — not the 1951 Act — governs the roll —** The Representation of the People Act, 1950 deals with the allocation of seats and the preparation of rolls; the 1951 Act deals with the conduct of elections and disputes. Section 21 of the 1950 Act requires the roll to be prepared and revised, and Section 21(3) empowers the Commission to direct a special revision at any time for reasons recorded. Section 16 lists the disqualifications for registration, including not being a citizen, and Section 22

	permits correction of entries. Detailed procedure lies in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. 3. **The ERO is the statutory decision-maker, and every decision is appealable —** The Electoral Registration Officer, usually a revenue or civic officer, is appointed under Section 13B of the 1950 Act and decides claims and objections after notice and hearing. An appeal lies to the District Election Officer and onward to the Chief Electoral Officer of the State under Section 24. The Supreme Court in Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995) held that a person already on the roll cannot be struck off on suspicion alone, and that the authority must give a fair opportunity and weigh all evidence. This is why the Delhi CEO's promise of a "speaking and appealable order" is a legal requirement, not a courtesy. 4. **Election Commissioners now sit under a 2023 statute —** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 provides for appointment by the President on the recommendation of a selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. The Commission has been multi-member since 1993. A CEC can be removed only in the manner of a Supreme Court judge, while other Election Commissioners can be removed on the CEC's recommendation, under the proviso to Article 324(5).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Electoral roll integrity is a GS2 staple that the SIR has made current —** The syllabus names "salient features of the Representation of People's Act" and "appointment to various constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various constitutional bodies". UPSC has asked on the Election Commission's independence and on electoral reforms repeatedly in Mains, and Prelims has tested Articles 324-329 and the difference between the 1950 and 1951 Acts. 2. **The examinable tension is the burden of proof —** Prelims will ask who prepares the roll and under which Act; Mains will ask whether a revision that requires the elector to prove linkage to a 2002 roll is consistent with universal adult franchise. A candidate who can cite Section 21(3), the ERO's hearing duty and Lal Babu Hussein will score above one who writes only about "voter disenfranchisement". 3. **Today's list is the best case study you will get —** When the software flags an Election Commissioner, a CAG, a Foreign Secretary and a man dead since 2024, it demonstrates in one sentence both the thoroughness and the crudeness of algorithmic verification. Use the example; do not use the names in a Prelims answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 324 vests 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. • Article 325 provides for one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency and prohibits exclusion on grounds only of religion, race, caste or sex. • Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the qualifying age was reduced from 21 to 18 years by the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988. • Preparation and revision of electoral rolls is governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1950; Section 21(3) empowers the Election Commission to direct a special revision of the roll at any time. • The Electoral Registration Officer is appointed under Section 13B of the RPA, 1950; appeals against the ERO's decisions lie to the District Election Officer and

	then to the Chief Electoral Officer under Section 24. ● Under the CEC and Other ECs Act, 2023, Election Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. ● The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only in the like manner and on the like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court; other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation.
ANALYSIS	1. **A notice to an Election Commissioner is evidence that the filter is blind, which is both its defence and its indictment —** The EC can fairly argue that a system which flags its own member and the CAG is not targeting anyone; neutrality of the algorithm is the best answer to the charge of partisan purging. But the same fact proves that the matching rule produces false positives at scale among people whose eligibility is beyond doubt. If an Election Commissioner can fail a name-match, a migrant labourer whose name was transliterated three different ways certainly will. The error rate is the same; what differs is the cost of clearing it. 2. **The real change is the shift of burden from the State to the citizen —** Under the ordinary summary revision, the State had to show a reason to remove an entry. A "no mapping" flag inverts that: the elector must now demonstrate a link to a roll prepared about 24 years ago. Lal Babu Hussein said suspicion alone cannot strike a name off, and the Delhi CEO's statement reaffirms that no deletion without a hearing. The question for Mains is whether a hearing is a real safeguard when 33 lakh people must attend one within roughly two months, before claims close on October 30. 3. **A dead man on the draft roll cuts against the Commission's own premise —** The SIR is justified as a cleansing exercise, and Delhi's draft roll already removed 47.56 lakh names as dead, shifted or duplicate. Yet Bibek Debroy, whose death in November 2024 was national news, survived that cleansing and was flagged only for "no mapping". The deletion stage and the verification stage are therefore not talking to each other; death registration data, which the State already holds, was evidently not used to clean the roll. 4. **The three papers' different totals are a governance point, not a footnote —** The Hindu reports 33.1 lakh notices, The Economic Times 33.13 lakh, and The Indian Express 31.63 lakh. For a process whose legitimacy rests on precision, the absence of a single published, constituency-wise figure from the CEO invites exactly the suspicion the exercise is meant to dispel. Publishing the numbers by category — no mapping, self-name mismatch, parent-name mismatch — would cost nothing and settle half the political argument. 5. **The counter-view deserves its full weight —** Rolls that carry the dead, the shifted and the duplicated are themselves a threat to free and fair elections, because every ghost entry is a potential false vote. An intensive revision is expressly permitted by Section 21(3), and India has done them before. The defensible position is not that the SIR is illegitimate, but that its verification design should rely more on data the State already holds and less on documents the elector may never have been given.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The special intensive revision of electoral rolls has transferred the burden of proving eligibility from the State to the elector." Examine this statement in the light of Articles 325 and 326 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950. Suggest safeguards that would preserve both the accuracy and the inclusiveness of the roll. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the SIR in one line as a fresh, door-to-door re-verification under Section 21(3) of the RPA, 1950, and state that Delhi's draft roll has produced notices to

over 31-33 lakh electors, including an Election Commissioner — a single example that frames the problem.

2. **Body — The constitutional and statutory frame —** Article 324 for the EC's power, Article 325 for the single roll without exclusion, Article 326 for adult suffrage; Sections 16, 21, 22 and 24 of the 1950 Act, and the ERO's duty to hear. Cite Lal Babu Hussein (1995) for the principle that suspicion cannot justify deletion.
3. **Body — Where the burden shifts —** Explain "no mapping" and "logical discrepancy" flags generated by ECINET, the requirement to link to a roughly 2002 roll, and the time window up to October 30. Contrast the ease with which a senior official is validated with the difficulty a poor or migrant elector faces. Note the dead-elector example to show the cleaning stage and the verification stage are disconnected.
4. **Body — The case for the SIR —** Concede that inflated rolls threaten electoral integrity, that the power is explicit in law and that the Delhi CEO has committed to speaking, appealable orders. A balanced answer earns more than a one-sided one.
5. **Conclusion —** Propose concrete safeguards: use of death and migration data held by the State before issuing notices, publication of category-wise figures by constituency, a longer window for hearings with doorstep verification by BLOs, and a presumption in favour of electors already on the roll unless there is positive evidence of ineligibility.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the ERO of a constituency with 1.5 lakh notices and six weeks to the close of claims. How do you prevent the hearing from becoming a formality?

Approach: First triage the notices: self-name and parent-name mismatches are usually spelling issues that a Booth Level Officer can resolve at the doorstep with any one identity document, so dispose of them in bulk. Reserve formal hearings for true no-mapping cases, and schedule them by locality with SMS intimation so that daily-wage earners are not asked to queue repeatedly. Record reasons in every order, because an unreasoned deletion will be set aside in appeal and will cost more time than it saved. Report category-wise progress daily to the District Election Officer so that the bottleneck is visible before the deadline, not after.

Q2. A senior officer's entry is validated within a day, while a slum resident's identical mismatch is still pending. A journalist asks you why. What do you say?

Approach: Acknowledge the fact rather than deny it, because the timestamps are on record. Explain that the officer produced documents immediately, and that the office's duty is to ensure the same speed for everyone, which it has not yet achieved. Then act: send a BLO to the resident that week, and issue an internal instruction that no category of elector gets out-of-turn disposal. Equal treatment in a verification drive is not only fairness; it is the only thing that keeps the whole exercise credible.

Q3. As a member of an interview board, would you support using Aadhaar or death-registration databases to clean electoral rolls automatically?

Approach: I would support using them to generate leads, not to delete names. The Debroy case shows that State databases can catch errors the SIR missed, and a death record matched to an elector should trigger a field check. But automatic deletion on a database match would repeat the very error of the present process — treating a data mismatch as proof of ineligibility. The final act of removing a citizen from the roll should remain a reasoned, human and appealable decision.

1.2 Karnataka Cabinet Grants Tulu Additional Official Language Status in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi

THE NEWS Mangaluru, Karnataka. The Karnataka Cabinet, meeting in Mangaluru on September 18, decided to accord additional official (administrative) language status to Tulu, a language commonly spoken in Dakshina Kannada district, the southern parts of Udupi district and the northern parts of Kasaragod district in Keralam, The Hindu's explainer reports. Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said the status would apply to administrative matters in the two Karnataka districts, and that the government would release ₹82 lakh annually for translation, training and language-usage purposes. B. Shivarama Shetty, former Project Director of the Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Kannada at the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysuru, explained that elected representatives would be able to speak in Tulu at gram sabhas and at gram, taluk and zilla panchayat meetings, and at urban local body meetings such as city corporation, city municipal council and town municipal council meetings; government circulars and orders in the two districts should also carry Tulu, and people can submit applications to departments in Tulu. On January 30, 2023, the then BJP government's Kannada and Culture Minister V. Sunil Kumar formed a committee under M. Mohan Alva, Chairman of Alva's Education Foundation, Moodbidri, to report within a week; the model code of conduct for the 2023 Assembly election, declared on March 29, 2023, intervened, and the BJP lost power. The Congress government then set up a committee under K.M. Gayatri, Director of Kannada and Culture, to study how Andhra Pradesh granted additional official status to Urdu; it visited Andhra Pradesh on January 19 and 20, 2026 and reported on March 4. The Cabinet decision is not self-executing. Section 2 of the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963 names Kannada as the official language, and legal commentators quoted by the paper say the Act must be amended to add Tulu for the two districts, followed by the Governor's assent and a notification — the route Andhra Pradesh and Telangana took for Urdu. Tulu is taught as a third optional language from Class 6 to 10 in the two districts since 2010-11; Mangalore University's two-year postgraduate programme, begun in 2018-19, was wound up from 2024-25 for want of students. The Registrar General and Census Commissioner recognises Tulu as an independent language, but it is not in the Eighth Schedule. The syllabus link is Articles 343-351, on official languages.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Tulu recognised by the Census as a distinct but non-scheduled language → decades-long demand for official and Eighth Schedule status → 2023 committee aborted by elections → 2026 committee studies Andhra's Urdu model → Cabinet decision on September 18 → Official Language Act amendment still required

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Article 345 gives the State legislature, not the Cabinet, the power to choose its languages —** Article 345 provides that, subject to Articles 346 and 347, the Legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State, or Hindi, as the language for all or any of its official purposes. The operative words are "by law": an executive decision alone cannot make a language official. That is why Karnataka must amend its Official Language Act, 1963. Until a law is made, English continues for the purposes for which it was used before the Constitution.

2. **Article 347 is the Centre's route for a minority language inside a State —** Article 347 allows the President, on a demand being made, to direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised throughout the State or any part of it, if satisfied that such a proportion desires it. Article 346 fixes the language for communication between States and between a State and the Union. Article 350A directs States to provide instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage for children of linguistic minority groups, and Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President.

3. **The Eighth Schedule is a separate list with separate consequences —** The Eighth Schedule lists 22 languages. Sindhi was added by the 21st Amendment (1967); Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali by the 71st Amendment (1992); and Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali by the 92nd Amendment (2003). Inclusion does not make a language an official language of any State; it relates to Articles 344(1) and 351, on the Official Language Commission and the development of Hindi, and carries practical benefits such as recognition in certain examinations and by the Sahitya Akademi. Tulu remains outside it.

4. **Tulu is a Dravidian language with its own script tradition —** Tulu belongs to the South

	Dravidian branch of the Dravidian family and is spoken mainly in the coastal region historically called Tulu Nadu. The Census has long returned it as a separate language rather than a dialect of Kannada. It is today written largely in the Kannada script, although a historical Tulu script (Tigalari) exists. Kannada was declared a classical language by the Union government in 2008.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Official languages are a direct Prelims area —** Articles 343 to 351 appear in the syllabus under "provisions of the Constitution". UPSC has asked about the Eighth Schedule, about which languages are classical, and about the constitutional provisions on linguistic minorities. The distinction between an official language under Article 345 and a scheduled language is the classic trap. 2. **Language politics recurs in GS1 and GS2 —** Linguistic reorganisation of States, regionalism and the three-language formula are GS1 society topics, while the demand for Eighth Schedule inclusion — Tulu, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Kurmali and others — is a GS2 federalism theme. This card also carries a panchayat angle: language of deliberation in gram sabhas bears directly on participation.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under Article 345, the Legislature of a State may by law adopt one or more languages in use in the State, or Hindi, as its official language; an executive order alone is insufficient. • Under Article 347, the President may, on a demand being made, direct that a language spoken by a substantial proportion of a State's population be officially recognised in the State or any part of it. • Article 350A requires States to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage to children of linguistic minority groups; Article 350B provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President. • The Eighth Schedule contains 22 languages; the 92nd Amendment, 2003 added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali, and the 71st Amendment, 1992 added Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali. • Inclusion in the Eighth Schedule does not by itself make a language the official language of any State. • Tulu is a Dravidian language returned separately in the Census but is not included in the Eighth Schedule. • Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have declared Urdu as an additional official language by amending their State official language laws.
ANALYSIS	1. **The ₹82 lakh figure tells you the reform is symbolic unless the Act follows —** Official status matters only where it creates enforceable rights: the right to file an application, receive a reply or read an order in one's language. Those rights exist only once Section 2 of the 1963 Act is amended, because Article 345 requires a law. Until then the Cabinet decision is a statement of intent. The budget of ₹82 lakh a year across two districts funds translation and training at a modest scale, which suggests the government itself expects a gradual, not immediate, shift. 2. **District-limited official status is the right design for a regional language —** Declaring Tulu official across Karnataka would be meaningless in Kalaburagi and resented in Mysuru; confining it to Dakshina Kannada and Udupi matches the language to its speakers. This is the logic of Article 347, which speaks of recognition "throughout the State or such part thereof". The Andhra and Telangana Urdu precedent shows the model is workable. The counter-view is that it multiplies administrative languages and may weaken Kannada as the unifying State language — a concern Karnataka's own

	linguistic politics makes real. 3. **The gram sabha provision is the most consequential part, and the least discussed —** Allowing members to speak in Tulu at gram sabhas and panchayat meetings lowers the cost of participation for exactly the people the 73rd Amendment intended to empower. Deliberation in a language one thinks in is more than symbolism; it changes who speaks. The practical difficulty is the officer: a Panchayat Development Officer posted from outside the district who cannot follow the discussion will depend on an interpreter, and the record may still be kept in Kannada. 4. **Official status and Eighth Schedule status are being run together in public debate, and they should not be —** The Tulu movement's larger demand has long been Eighth Schedule inclusion, which only Parliament can grant by constitutional amendment. The State's decision does not advance that directly. It does, however, create an administrative record of use — circulars, applications, proceedings — which strengthens the case the next time a committee examines criteria for inclusion, since India has never fixed objective criteria for the Eighth Schedule. 5. **Education is the weak leg of the policy —** Tulu is taught only as a third optional language from Class 6 to Class 10, and Mangalore University closed its postgraduate programme from 2024-25 because too few students enrolled. An official language that young people cannot study beyond school will struggle to produce the translators and officers the policy needs. Status without a pipeline of trained users risks becoming ceremonial.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The recognition of regional languages as additional official languages of a State strengthens democratic participation but complicates administration." Discuss with reference to Article 345 and recent State practice. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the Karnataka Cabinet's September 18 decision to give Tulu additional official status in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, and state that under Article 345 it becomes effective only when the Official Language Act, 1963 is amended. 2. **Body — Constitutional framework —** Explain Articles 345, 346 and 347, and the difference between an official language and an Eighth Schedule language. Mention Articles 350A and 350B for linguistic minorities, and the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Urdu precedent. 3. **Body — The participation argument —** Use the gram sabha and panchayat provisions, applications to departments in Tulu, and circulars in Tulu to argue that the language of the State shapes who can engage with it, linking to the 73rd and 74th Amendments. 4. **Body — The administrative cost —** Officials who do not know the language, translation dependence, record-keeping in two languages, the modest ₹82 lakh budget, and the weak education pipeline evidenced by the closure of the Mangalore University programme. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue for district-limited recognition backed by law, a phased translation cadre, and inclusion of the language in local-service recruitment, so that recognition becomes a working right rather than a gesture.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Dakshina Kannada after the Act is amended. Half your taluk-level officers do not know Tulu. What do you do in the first three months?** ***Approach:*** Map which offices receive the most public applications — revenue, panchayat, police stations — and place a trained translator or a Tulu-speaking staff member at each of those counters first. Run a short spoken-Tulu module for officers

posted from outside the district, with the ₹82 lakh budget prioritising frontline training over publicity. Issue a standing instruction that no application shall be returned for being in Tulu, and that replies will be given in the applicant's language within the normal timeline. Track the number of Tulu applications monthly, because the data will tell the government whether the right is being used.

Q2. A Kannada organisation protests that Tulu status dilutes Kannada as the State's language. How do you respond as the district's senior officer?

Approach: Meet them and explain the legal position plainly: Kannada remains the official language of the State under the 1963 Act, and Tulu is an additional language for administrative use only in two districts. Point out that nothing in the decision removes Kannada from any circular, order or record. Keep the conversation factual rather than defending the political decision, which is not the officer's role. If they wish to make a representation to the government, forward it promptly.

Q3. As an interview-board question: should India fix objective criteria for inclusion of languages in the Eighth Schedule?

Approach: Yes, because the present absence of criteria makes inclusion a matter of political bargaining, and every new addition invites dozens of fresh demands. Criteria could include number of speakers, a body of written literature, independent recognition by the Census, and use in education. The counter-argument is that any threshold will exclude smaller but culturally significant languages, so criteria should be necessary but not sufficient. Transparent criteria would at least make refusals defensible.

1.3 ED Examines TMC's ₹5.22 Crore Advance for Charter Flights Not Yet Flown, Freezes Six Party Accounts

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is examining advance payments totalling ₹5.22 crore made by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) for aviation services for July, August and September 2026, even though the services covered had not been availed at the time of the agency's account analysis, The Economic Times reports, citing people in the know. The finding forms part of the ED's wider investigation into the party's financial dealings with aviation companies and an ongoing probe into the alleged routing and utilisation of party funds through Carewell Aviation India Pvt Ltd. The ED has alleged that the TMC transferred about ₹162.09 crore to Carewell Group entities between July 2021 and June 2026. Under an aircraft charter agreement executed in April 2023, the TMC paid an interest-free refundable security deposit of ₹60 crore; a separate helicopter charter agreement executed in March 2025 involved another refundable deposit of ₹28.5 crore, taking total deposits to ₹88.5 crore. The ED's account analysis records that ₹133.84 crore received by Carewell was subsequently layered — moved through successive transactions to obscure its origin — into a newly incorporated related entity, Carewell Flyjet IFSC Pvt Ltd in Ahmedabad's GIFT City, as inter-corporate loans for the acquisition of an Embraer Legacy 600 aircraft and an Agusta 109 Grand New helicopter. The ED is also examining payments to other aviation companies: in one instance, involving a Falcon 2000 chartered from Windborne Aviation, the TMC agreed to a minimum 150-hour commitment over 60 days but ultimately used the aircraft for only around 11-12 hours while paying approximately ₹9.09 crore. ET had reported last week that the TMC paid substantially more per flying hour for an aircraft operated by Carewell than the average rate charged by the company to its other clients. The agency has frozen six bank accounts of the TMC with balances aggregating about ₹440 crore under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The TMC has challenged the ED's action and disputed the allegations; the paper notes that advance payments can arise from ordinary contractual arrangements, and the investigation remains underway. The syllabus link is twofold: the powers of the ED under the PMLA, and the regulation of political party finance, where India's law caps what a candidate may spend but not what a party may.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Party spending on campaign aviation lies largely outside candidate expenditure limits → large deposits and advances to a charter operator → ED account analysis alleges layering into a GIFT City related entity → PMLA freeze of six party accounts worth about ₹440 crore → party challenges, probe continues

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The PMLA punishes the laundering, not the underlying crime —** The Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 makes it an offence under Section 3 to be involved in any process or activity connected with the proceeds of crime, including concealment, possession, acquisition or use, and projecting it as untainted. "Proceeds of crime" must arise from a "scheduled offence" listed in the Act's Schedule, so a PMLA case always rests on a predicate offence registered by some agency. Section 4 prescribes rigorous imprisonment of three to seven years, extendable to ten years where the predicate offence falls under the NDPS Act. 2. **Freezing and attachment are separate powers with separate checks —** Section 5 allows provisional attachment of property believed to be proceeds of crime for up to 180 days, which must be confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority. Section 17 permits search and seizure, and where seizure is not practicable, a freezing order over property including bank accounts, which too must be placed before the Adjudicating Authority. Appeals lie to the Appellate Tribunal and then to the High Court. In Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022) the Supreme Court upheld the core provisions of the Act, including the twin conditions for bail under Section 45. 3. **India caps candidate spending, not party spending —** Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 requires every candidate to keep an account of election expenditure within limits prescribed by the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. Explanation 1 to Section 77 excludes expenditure incurred by leaders of a political party on travel, including by air, for propagating the party's programme. There is no statutory ceiling on what a party spends. Parties file annual contribution reports and audited accounts, and their income is exempt from tax under Section 13A of the Income-tax Act, 1961, subject to conditions. 4. **The Enforcement Directorate is a departmental agency, not a statutory body —** The ED functions under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, and enforces the PMLA, the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018. It is not created by a statute of its own; its officers derive powers from the Acts they administer. Its Director's tenure is governed by the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003, as amended.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Electoral finance is a perennial GS2 question —** UPSC has asked on the role of money power in elections, on State funding of elections and on the Election Commission's powers over expenditure. After the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bond scheme in Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India (2024), the transparency of party finance has returned to the centre of the syllabus theme "electoral reforms". 2. **The use of central agencies against political actors is an interview and Mains favourite —** Questions on the independence of investigative agencies, the low conviction rate under the PMLA and the federal friction generated by central probes into State parties recur. The balanced answer acknowledges both the legitimacy of investigating party finances and the danger of selective enforcement.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 defines the offence of money laundering; proceeds of crime must be derived from a scheduled offence listed in the Act. • Under Section 5 of the PMLA, provisional attachment of property can last up to 180 days and must be confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority. • In Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of key PMLA provisions including the twin bail conditions under Section 45. • The Enforcement Directorate functions under the Department of Revenue,

	Ministry of Finance, and enforces the PMLA, FEMA and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018. ● Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 requires candidates to maintain election expenditure accounts; Explanation 1 excludes travel expenditure by party leaders for propagating the party programme. ● Income of registered political parties is exempt from income tax under Section 13A of the Income-tax Act, 1961, subject to maintenance of accounts and audit. ● The Supreme Court struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme in Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India (2024).
ANALYSIS	1. **The legal gap is not in the PMLA but in election law —** A party may lawfully spend almost without limit on aircraft because Section 77 caps only candidate spending and expressly excludes leaders' travel. That creates a category of large, lightly scrutinised party expenditure. Whether or not the ED's allegations hold, the case exposes that the natural regulator of party spending — the Election Commission — has no statutory ceiling to enforce, which leaves the field to an agency whose tool is criminal law. 2. **An advance for unused services is not, by itself, laundering —** The ET report itself notes that advances can arise from ordinary contracts, and minimum-hour commitments are common in charter aviation. The ED must connect the money to a scheduled offence to sustain a PMLA case; overpayment or poor bargaining is not a crime. The prosecutorial weight will therefore rest on the alleged layering of ₹133.84 crore into a related GIFT City entity, not on the ₹5.22 crore advance that makes the headline. 3. **Freezing a party's accounts is a heavier measure than freezing a company's —** About ₹440 crore across six accounts is the working capital of a political organisation. A freeze under Section 17 is interim and must go before the Adjudicating Authority, but in practice it can disable a party for months. The counter-view is that parties cannot claim immunity from money-laundering law, and the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling gives the ED wide latitude. The balance lies in speed: a freeze on a political party should face faster adjudication than one on a private firm. 4. **Selective enforcement is the charge every such case now invites —** When central agencies investigate opposition parties, the perception of partisanship arises regardless of the evidence. The institutional answer is not to stop investigating, but to publish outcome data — conviction rates, time to charge-sheet, share of cases by party — so that fairness can be judged on record rather than rhetoric. The low historic conviction rate under the PMLA makes that transparency more, not less, necessary.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The absence of a ceiling on political party expenditure has made criminal investigation the default instrument of regulating party finance in India." Critically examine, with reference to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Cite the ED's examination of TMC's ₹5.22 crore advance for charter flights and the freeze of six party accounts worth about ₹440 crore as the occasion, and state the thesis about regulatory vacuum. 2. **Body — The legal vacuum —** Section 77 of the RPA, 1951, the candidate ceiling, Explanation 1 excluding leaders' travel, and the absence of any party ceiling; Section 13A tax exemption; the 2024 electoral bonds judgment on transparency. 3. **Body — The PMLA as a substitute regulator —** Sections 3, 5 and 17, the need for a scheduled offence, the Adjudicating Authority, Vijay Madanlal Choudhary (2022). Explain why criminal law is a blunt tool for questions of commercial reasonableness

	such as unused charter hours. 4. **Body — The counter-view —** Parties are not above the law; layering of funds through related entities is precisely what the PMLA exists to catch; transparency failures by parties have invited scrutiny. 5. **Conclusion —** Recommend a statutory cap or at least mandatory itemised disclosure of party expenditure, audit by an independent auditor empanelled by the Election Commission, and time-bound adjudication of any freeze on a party’s accounts.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Adjudicating Authority reviewing a freeze on a political party’s accounts. What do you look for?** ***Approach:*** First, whether the ED has identified a scheduled offence and a reasonable belief, recorded in writing, that the frozen money is proceeds of crime; a freeze cannot rest on suspicion of commercial extravagance. Second, whether the amount frozen is proportionate to the alleged proceeds, since freezing ₹440 crore against a smaller alleged sum would be excessive. Third, whether the party can be permitted to operate the account for routine expenses under supervision. Record reasons that address each point, because the order will be tested on appeal. **Q2. As Chief Electoral Officer, a citizen asks why a party can spend crores on aircraft while a candidate is capped. What do you say?** ***Approach:*** Explain the law honestly: the Representation of the People Act caps candidate expenditure and specifically excludes leaders’ travel for party propaganda, and there is no statutory cap on party spending. The Election Commission can seek expenditure statements from parties but cannot enforce a ceiling that Parliament has not enacted. Note that the Commission has in the past recommended reforms to party finance. A public official should not defend a gap in the law as if it were a design choice. **Q3. In an interview: can a probe into an opposition party ever be seen as fair while elections are near?** ***Approach:*** It can be fair and still not be seen as fair, which is why the process matters as much as the outcome. The agency should act on documented evidence, avoid timing that coincides with campaign milestones where the investigation allows, and move swiftly to charge-sheet or closure. Courts and Adjudicating Authorities should prioritise such matters. Fairness in a democracy is proved by consistency across parties over time, not by any single case.

2. Economy

Every story today is about a rule that looks settled until someone tests it. A company's own rulebook is being tested against a head-count vote, an inflation target against a policy rate that no longer bites, Atmanirbhar Bharat against an import bill that keeps rising, a critical-minerals mission against statistics that cannot see the market it wants to build, and a State's promise of industrial land against its own history. In each, the scarce factor is not money but credibility: the confidence that the rule written today will still hold tomorrow.

2.1 Tata Trusts Declares Chandrasekaran's Reappointment Void, Says Casting Vote Cannot Override Nominee-Director Veto

THE NEWS Mumbai. Tata Trusts, chaired by Noel Tata and the majority owner of Tata Sons with about 66% of its shares, said in a statement on Sunday, September 20, that the Tata Sons board resolution of September 17 reappointing N. Chandrasekaran as executive chairman for a further five years is "void ab initio" — a Latin phrase meaning invalid from the very beginning, so that in law the act is treated as if it never happened. Mr. Chandrasekaran had announced in early August that he would not seek another term when his tenure ends on February 20, 2027; at the September 17 meeting he acceded to the board's request to reconsider, and the board approved his reappointment by a 4-1 vote, as reported by The Indian Express. The Trusts have two nominee directors on the board — directors placed there to represent a shareholder — Venu Srinivasan, who voted in favour, and Noel Tata, who voted against. The Trusts rely on Article 121 of the Tata Sons Articles of Association (AoA), the company's internal constitution, which requires the affirmative support of a majority of Trust-nominated directors. "Majority amongst two is two and not one," the statement said. The Hindu reports that the resolutions were carried on the basis of a casting vote — a tie-breaking extra vote — by the chairman of the meeting, independent director Harish Manwani. The Trusts said a casting vote is available only where votes are equal at the overall board level: "Whether the result of the vote was 4:1, or any other figure, is irrelevant. A condition is either met, or it is not." They denied any deadlock and recalled that in the Cyrus Mistry litigation Tata Sons itself defended Articles 104B and 121 before the Supreme Court, after the NCLAT had called them oppressive, and won. The Economic Times reports that Noel Tata wrote to company secretary Suprakash Mukhopadhyay demanding a public correction, that the Trusts are evaluating the National Company Law Tribunal or the Bombay High Court. Former Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has given a legal opinion that a casting vote cannot replace a missing majority; senior advocates Harish Salve and Abhishek Manu Singhvi have taken opposite sides. The same meeting voted to pursue a listing, which the Shapoorji Pallonji Group (just over 18%) supports. The syllabus link is corporate governance and company law.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Articles 104B and 121 give Trust nominees an affirmative vote → Tata Sons defends them in the Mistry litigation and the Supreme Court upholds them → Chandrasekaran says in August he will not seek another term, then accepts the board's request → board votes 4-1 on September 17 with the two Trust nominees split and a casting vote invoked → Trusts call the resolution void ab initio and weigh the NCLT or Bombay High Court

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Articles of Association are a binding contract, not an internal memo** — Under Section 5 of the Companies Act, 2013, the articles contain the regulations for the management of a company, and under Section 10 the memorandum and articles bind the company and its members as if each member had signed them. Articles can be altered only by a special resolution — at least three-fourths of votes cast — under Section 14. Section 5(3) further allows entrenchment, meaning a provision can be made alterable only if conditions stricter than a special resolution are met. This is the legal machinery through which a shareholder such as Tata Trusts can hold a veto that ordinary board voting cannot remove.

2. **A casting vote comes from the articles, and it only breaks a tie** — The Companies Act does not itself give the chairperson of a board a casting vote. The model articles in Table F of Schedule I, which apply to a company limited by shares unless its own articles exclude or modify them, provide that in case of an equality of votes the chairperson shall have a second or casting vote. A casting vote therefore resolves a tie among the votes cast; it is not a device to supply a consent that a separate condition requires. Whether a split between two nominee directors is a "tie" in this sense is the

	precise legal question in the Tata dispute. 3. **Managerial appointments need both the board and the shareholders —** Section 196 of the Companies Act, 2013 limits the appointment of a managing director or whole-time director to a term of not more than five years at a time, and a reappointment cannot be made earlier than one year before the current term expires. The appointment approved by the board is subject to approval by a resolution at the next general meeting of shareholders. Section 166 requires every director, including a nominee director, to act in good faith in the best interests of the company, its employees, shareholders, the community and the environment. 4. **Oppression and mismanagement is the route disputes of this kind take —** Sections 241 and 242 allow members to petition the National Company Law Tribunal when a company's affairs are conducted in a manner prejudicial or oppressive to them, and Section 244 sets the eligibility threshold, such as members holding one-tenth of the issued share capital. The NCLT is constituted under Section 408, the NCLAT under Section 410, and an appeal lies to the Supreme Court on a question of law under Section 423. In Tata Consultancy Services Ltd v. Cyrus Investments Pvt Ltd, decided in March 2021, the Supreme Court set aside the NCLAT's December 2019 order reinstating Cyrus Mistry and rejected the finding that the Trusts' affirmative rights were oppressive.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Corporate governance is named in the GS4 syllabus —** The ethics paper lists "corporate governance" alongside probity in public life, and GS3 covers the mobilisation of resources and the investment climate. A dispute between a majority owner and the board it nominates is a rare live illustration of both, and it can be used for questions on the separation of ownership and control, board independence and the role of tribunals. 2. **Prelims tests the architecture, not the personalities —** The examiner asks about special resolutions, the NCLT and NCLAT, the tenure limit for managing directors and the meaning of Latin legal terms. Void ab initio, voidable, and ultra vires are all fair game, and this story supplies the context for remembering the difference. 3. **A follow-on to the listing story already covered —** The RBI's refusal to let Tata Sons exit the upper-layer NBFC framework was covered earlier in the week; the new development is the challenge to the casting vote. An answer that keeps the two strands distinct — regulation by the RBI and governance inside the company — shows command of the material.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under Section 10 of the Companies Act, 2013, the memorandum and articles, when registered, bind the company and its members to the same extent as if each member had signed them. • Articles of association may be altered by a special resolution under Section 14 of the Companies Act, 2013; Section 5(3) permits entrenched provisions alterable only on stricter conditions. • Table F of Schedule I to the Companies Act, 2013 provides that in case of an equality of votes at a board meeting, the chairperson shall have a second or casting vote. • Under Section 196 of the Companies Act, 2013, a managing director or whole-time director cannot be appointed for more than five years at a time, and reappointment cannot be made earlier than one year before the expiry of the term. • Applications for relief against oppression and mismanagement lie before the National Company Law Tribunal under Sections 241-242 of the Companies Act,

2013.

- The NCLT is constituted under Section 408 and the NCLAT under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013; appeals from the NCLAT lie to the Supreme Court on questions of law.
- An act that is void ab initio is invalid from the outset and has no legal effect, whereas a voidable act is valid until it is set aside.

ANALYSIS

1. **The Trusts' strongest weapon is Tata Sons' own earlier argument —** The legal text of Article 121 matters less than the fact that Tata Sons told the Supreme Court these rights were a legitimate protection for the majority shareholder. Courts dislike a litigant who praises a clause when it helps and disowns it when it binds, and the Trusts have framed their statement precisely around that inconsistency. The board's best reply is not that the rights do not exist but that Article 121 covers only specified matters and that this particular decision falls outside them. The newspapers do not print the list of matters, and the whole dispute may turn on it.

2. **A 4-1 vote is not a tie, so the casting vote was doing something else —** A casting vote exists to break an equality of votes, and there was no equality among five directors voting 4-1. The only "tie" was one-one between the two Trust nominees, and using the chairman's vote to break that tie converts a veto held by a shareholder into a matter the board can override. That reading would empty every affirmative-vote clause in Indian corporate law of meaning, which is why the Trusts insist the condition is separate from the head count. The counter-view is the deadlock argument: a company cannot be allowed to freeze, and courts sometimes read articles so that management can function. But a veto is designed to stop a decision; its exercise is not paralysis.

3. **The general meeting may make the courtroom battle partly redundant —** Under Section 196 the board's appointment of an executive chairman must be approved at the next general meeting, and a shareholder with about 66% of the shares can defeat an ordinary resolution on its own. The Indian Express editorial expects both decisions to move to the annual general meeting. Litigation therefore is less about the final outcome than about who controls the company in the interim and whose reading of the articles becomes the precedent. That is also why the Trusts want a public correction: the record of what the board decided is itself the prize.

4. **The real contest is between ownership and professional management —** Harish Salve's line that a global institution cannot be run by three trustees and Abhishek Manu Singhvi's line that owners' rights cannot be nullified are two answers to the oldest question in corporate governance: who governs a firm whose owners are not its managers. Indian governance debates usually concern a dominant promoter oppressing minority investors; here the majority owner claims oppression by the board it appoints. The entrepreneurial factor of production — the capacity to take strategic decisions — is being fought over, not the capital. A listing would dilute the Trusts' control, which is why the reappointment and the listing were contested together.

5. **Governance disputes carry a price in the capital market —** The Economic Times reports that Jaguar Land Rover is seeking about £1 billion from banks while lenders weigh the uncertainty over the group's leadership, and that the RBI has filed a caveat in the Bombay High Court — a request to be heard before any order is passed against it — anticipating a challenge to its listing directive. The Shapoorji Pallonji Group, whose stake is pledged, needs a listing to monetise. Every week of dispute therefore has a cost borne by lenders, minority holders and operating companies that had no vote at all.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"A board resolution can command a majority of directors and yet fail under the company's own articles." In the context of the dispute between Tata Trusts and the Tata

	Sons board, examine the role of articles of association, nominee directors and casting votes in Indian corporate governance. Suggest safeguards that balance shareholder protection with managerial continuity. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the facts in two lines: a 4-1 board vote on September 17 reappointing the chairman, one of two Trust nominees opposing, a casting vote invoked, and the majority shareholder declaring the resolution void ab initio under Article 121. 2. **Body — the legal architecture —** Explain Sections 5, 10 and 14 of the Companies Act, 2013 on articles as a binding contract and entrenchment; the casting vote as a model-article provision in Table F that applies only to an equality of votes; and Section 196's requirement of shareholder approval for managerial appointments. 3. **Body — both sides —** Give the Trusts' argument (separate condition, Tata Sons' own stand before the Supreme Court in the Mistry case) and the board's (continuity, deadlock, professional management of a global group). Concede that affirmative rights can be misused to block legitimate business, and that their scope must be clearly listed. 4. **Body — safeguards —** Suggest precise drafting of reserved matters in articles, disclosure of such rights to all shareholders, time-bound escalation to a general meeting in case of a split, fast-track NCLT hearing for disputes over the validity of board resolutions, and clarity on the fiduciary duty of nominee directors under Section 166. 5. **Conclusion —** Close on the principle that rules written into a company's constitution must bind in bad times as well as good, since investor confidence in Indian firms depends on the predictability of governance, not on who wins a particular vote.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the company secretary of a large holding company. Immediately after a contested board vote, the majority shareholder writes to you demanding a public correction of the minutes. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** The company secretary's duty is to record accurately what happened, not to decide who is legally right. I would prepare the minutes faithfully, recording each director's vote, the chairman's ruling on the casting vote and any dissent, and circulate the draft to all directors for comments within the statutory timeline. I would place the shareholder's letter before the board and seek independent legal advice on the validity question rather than giving my own opinion in public. Accurate minutes protect every party, because they will be the primary evidence before any tribunal. **Q2. As a member of the NCLT bench, you receive a plea to stay a board resolution on the ground that it violates the articles. How would you approach interim relief?** ***Approach:*** I would examine whether there is a prima facie case on the text of the articles, whether the balance of convenience favours a stay and whether irreparable harm would follow either way. Since the chairman's current term runs to February 2027, there is no immediate vacuum in management, which weighs against disruptive interim orders. At the same time, I could direct that no irreversible step based on the disputed resolution be taken until the matter is heard, and fix an early date. Speed is itself a form of justice in corporate disputes, because uncertainty damages the company and its lenders. **Q3. An interview board asks: should a charitable trust that owns a majority of a commercial group have veto power over its business decisions?** ***Approach:*** Ownership normally carries control, and a trust that owns two-thirds of a company has a legitimate interest in how it is run, especially since the dividends fund its philanthropic work. The risk is that trustees lack commercial expertise and that a

veto becomes a tool for personal disputes rather than protection of the trust's interests. The answer lies in design: vetoes confined to clearly listed strategic matters, trustees bound by duties of prudence, and disputes routed to shareholders rather than paralysing the board. The problem in the present case is not that the veto exists but that its scope is disputed.

2.2 Real Policy Rate Nears Zero as August CPI Inflation Hits 4.82% With Repo at 5.25%

THE NEWS New Delhi. With the Reserve Bank of India holding its repo rate — the rate at which it lends overnight to banks — at 5.25%, Consumer Price Index inflation rose to 4.82% in August from 4.45% in July, the third consecutive month above the RBI's 4% target, writes Saumitra Bhaduri, Professor at the Madras School of Economics, in The Hindu. Food inflation is higher at 5.95%, and core inflation — inflation excluding the volatile food and fuel items — has risen to around 4.2%, suggesting that price pressures are broadening. The real policy rate is the policy rate minus expected inflation; the author argues that if the repo stays at 5.25% while inflation expectations move towards 5.25%, the ex-ante (forward-looking) real rate becomes approximately zero. At its August policy, the RBI kept a neutral stance — signalling neither an easing nor a tightening bias — and projected FY2026-27 inflation at around 5%. The risks cited are the monsoon and an external shock: renewed conflict in West Asia has disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and pushed Brent crude above $100 a barrel, approaching $110, while the rupee has weakened. Demand is strong: GDP growth is running at 7.8% and bank credit grew 19.1% year-on-year at the end of August. Deposits grew 17.8%, the fastest in a decade, but partly because of the RBI's special FCNR(B) scheme — foreign currency deposits of non-resident Indians — and the credit-deposit ratio was around 80.3%. The Economic Times reports that banks mobilised $127.22 billion through FCNR(B) deposits in less than three months until the dollar mop-up closed on August 31, with ICICI Bank at $17.88 billion and HSBC at $14.5 billion. The author cites RBI research on 2010-2013, when real returns on savings turned negative, household financial savings weakened and gold demand rose, with a correlation of 0.83 between gold imports and household inflation expectations. The one-year overnight indexed swap rate — a market contract whose price reveals expected short-term rates — is around 6%, signalling expected tightening. His conclusion: "A timely 25-basis-point adjustment may ultimately cost less than a delayed 50-basis-point correction" (one basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point). The syllabus link is monetary policy, inflation and the mobilisation of household savings — capital as a factor of production.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

West Asia conflict disrupts Hormuz shipping and lifts Brent above $100 → CPI rises to 4.82% in August, third month above 4%, with core at 4.2% → repo held at 5.25% under a neutral stance → ex-ante real policy rate approaches zero while credit grows 19.1% → savers shift from deposits towards gold and market assets and the case for an early 25-basis-point hike strengthens

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Inflation targeting is a statutory mandate, not a policy preference —** The Finance Act, 2016 amended the RBI Act, 1934 to insert Section 45ZA, under which the Central Government, in consultation with the RBI, sets the inflation target once every five years. The target notified in 2016 is 4% CPI inflation with a tolerance band of 2% to 6%. Under Section 45ZN, the RBI is deemed to have failed if average inflation stays above the upper or below the lower tolerance level for three consecutive quarters, and it must then report to the Centre the reasons and the remedial action proposed.

2. **The Monetary Policy Committee has six members and the Governor holds the casting vote —** Section 45ZB of the RBI Act provides for a six-member Monetary Policy Committee: the Governor as chairperson, the Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, one RBI officer nominated by the Central Board, and three members appointed by the Central Government for four years who are not eligible for reappointment. The quorum is four, decisions are by majority, and in case of a tie the Governor has a second or casting vote. The committee must meet at least four times a year, and the minutes are published.

3. **Real interest rate is the price of money after inflation —** The nominal rate is the rate written on a loan or deposit; the real rate is the nominal rate minus inflation. The ex-

	post real rate uses inflation that has already happened, while the ex-ante real rate uses expected inflation, and it is the ex-ante rate that shapes decisions to save, borrow and invest. A positive real rate rewards saving and restrains borrowing; a zero or negative real rate does the opposite, which is why central banks watch it rather than the nominal rate alone. 4. **FCNR(B) deposits put the exchange risk on the bank —** Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits are term deposits held by non-resident Indians in foreign currency with banks in India, for maturities of one to five years, and both principal and interest are repaid in that foreign currency. The exchange-rate risk is borne by the bank, which is why the RBI's offer of a concessional swap window — under which banks convert dollars into rupees at a set cost — makes mobilisation attractive. India used this route in 2013 to stabilise the rupee after the taper tantrum, when about $34 billion was raised.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Monetary policy and inflation are standing GS3 topics —** The syllabus names "Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development and employment". Questions on the flexible inflation targeting framework, the MPC and transmission recur, and Prelims regularly tests instruments such as repo, reverse repo, the standing deposit facility and the cash reserve ratio. 2. **Supply shocks test the logic of inflation targeting —** The examiner likes the question of whether a central bank should respond to an oil shock it cannot control. This story gives the textbook answer — look through temporary supply shocks — and the case against it when demand is strong and core inflation is rising. 3. **Household savings link monetary policy to capital formation —** The shift of household savings from bank deposits to gold, mutual funds and equities is directly relevant to questions on financial inclusion, the financialisation of savings and the funding of investment.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 45ZA of the RBI Act, 1934, inserted by the Finance Act, 2016, empowers the Central Government, in consultation with the RBI, to determine the inflation target once every five years. • The inflation target notified in 2016 is 4% CPI inflation with a lower tolerance limit of 2% and an upper tolerance limit of 6%. • The Monetary Policy Committee under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act has six members, of whom three are appointed by the Central Government for a term of four years without eligibility for reappointment. • In case of an equality of votes in the Monetary Policy Committee, the RBI Governor has a second or casting vote. • Under the RBI Act, failure to meet the inflation target means average inflation above the upper tolerance level or below the lower tolerance level for three consecutive quarters. • Core inflation measures the change in prices excluding food and fuel, which are the most volatile components of the consumer price index. • Under FCNR(B) deposits, non-resident Indians hold term deposits in foreign currency with banks in India, and the exchange-rate risk is borne by the bank.
ANALYSIS	1. **The market has already tightened even though the RBI has not —** A one-year overnight indexed swap rate of around 6%, against a repo of 5.25%, means the money market expects rates to rise and is already pricing loans and bonds accordingly. In that sense part of the tightening the author asks for is already in effect through market rates. The counter-argument cuts the other way: if the RBI fails to confirm what

	markets expect, it signals tolerance for higher inflation, and expectations — the variable that determines the ex-ante real rate — can drift upward. Central bank credibility is measured by whether markets' expectations are validated, not by the level of the repo alone. 2. **Looking through an oil shock is right only when demand is weak —** The standard doctrine says a central bank should ignore a supply shock such as higher crude prices, because rate hikes do not produce oil and only add a growth loss to a price shock. That doctrine assumes the shock stays confined to fuel. With GDP growing at 7.8%, credit at 19.1% and core inflation rising to 4.2%, the conditions for second-round effects — wages and prices of other goods adjusting to fuel costs — are present. The honest counter-view is that 4.82% is still inside the 2-6% band, which was designed precisely to absorb supply shocks without a reflexive rate response. 3. **The deposit surge is largely borrowed confidence, not domestic saving —** Deposit growth of 17.8% looks like strong savings, but $127.22 billion of FCNR(B) inflows mobilised in under three months accounts for much of it. That money is foreign currency, swapped into rupees at a cost, and the HSBC example of leverage of up to 19 times shows that much of it was borrowed money chasing yield rather than fresh saving. Domestic households, facing near-zero real returns on deposits, are moving to mutual funds, equities and gold. For capital formation this matters: gold is an unproductive asset for the economy, and the 2010-13 episode, with its 0.83 correlation between gold imports and inflation expectations, ended in a current account crisis. 4. **A zero real rate quietly transfers income from savers to borrowers —** Borrowers with loans linked to external benchmarks such as the repo rate see their costs fixed in nominal terms while inflation erodes the real value of their debt. Savers holding fixed deposits — often pensioners and households without market access — receive returns that barely keep pace with prices. The decision to hold rates steady is therefore not neutral in its distributional effects, even if the stance is called neutral. An answer that notices this links monetary policy to the GS2 concern with vulnerable sections. 5. **Timing is an instrument, but so is patience —** The author's best point is that a small early move preserves credibility and may prevent a larger later one. The case for waiting is that the West Asia shock could reverse as quickly as it arrived, and the monsoon outcome is not yet known; a hike that coincides with a supply-driven slowdown would hurt growth without reducing oil prices. The MPC's decision will turn on whether it reads rising core inflation as the beginning of a broad-based trend or as a pass-through that will fade. That judgment, not the formula, is where monetary policy is actually made.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"With inflation rising towards the policy rate, India risks a zero real interest rate environment even as growth and credit remain strong." Examine the case for and against an early monetary tightening by the Reserve Bank of India in the context of an external supply shock. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the real policy rate and state the numbers: repo at 5.25%, CPI at 4.82% in August, food at 5.95%, core around 4.2%, and the third month above the 4% target. 2. **Body — the case for tightening —** Strong demand (GDP 7.8%, credit 19.1%), broadening core inflation, market expectations shown by a one-year OIS of around 6%, the risk to household savings shown by the 2010-13 episode, and the argument that a 25-basis-point move now may prevent a 50-basis-point move later. 3. **Body — the case for patience —** Inflation remains within the 2-6% band; the shock is supply-side and external (Hormuz disruption, Brent above $100); rate hikes cannot

	lower oil prices; the monsoon outcome is uncertain; a premature hike could hurt growth. 4. **Body — the institutional frame —** Mention Section 45ZA and the flexible inflation targeting framework, the six-member MPC and the failure clause of three consecutive quarters, and explain that the framework allows flexibility for supply shocks but demands anchoring of expectations. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that the decisive variable is inflation expectations: if core inflation keeps rising, a calibrated early move protects credibility and savers; if it stabilises, patience is justified. Suggest clearer forward guidance as a low-cost tool in either case.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are an external member of the Monetary Policy Committee. Headline inflation is 4.82%, within the band, but core inflation is rising. The government is concerned about growth. How do you vote?** ***Approach:*** An external member is appointed precisely to bring an independent view, so my vote must be based on the inflation outlook and not on political preference. I would examine whether core inflation is rising because of pass-through from fuel costs or because of domestic demand pressure, and what surveys of household expectations show. If expectations are rising, I would vote for a small increase and explain in my published statement why a modest move now protects growth later. If not, I would vote to hold but record a clear tightening bias, since the minutes are my accountability to the public. **Q2. As the head of a public sector bank, you see deposits growing fast because of FCNR(B) inflows while domestic retail deposits are stagnant. What are the risks and what would you do?** ***Approach:*** Foreign currency deposits are useful but can be volatile; they mature in a bunch and their cost depends on the swap arrangement, so they are not a substitute for stable domestic deposits. I would avoid funding long-term loans with this money beyond its maturity profile and would stress-test for a scenario where deposits are withdrawn at maturity. At the same time, I would work on retail deposit products that offer competitive real returns, including for senior citizens. Relying on a one-time inflow to support 19% credit growth would be imprudent. **Q3. An interview board asks: why should a common citizen care whether the real interest rate is positive or zero?** ***Approach:*** Because it decides whether her savings are growing or shrinking in terms of what they can buy. At a zero real rate, a fixed deposit only keeps pace with prices, and after tax it loses value, which pushes families towards gold or riskier investments they may not understand. For a borrower the same condition is favourable, which is why the effect on society depends on whether one is a saver or a borrower. It also matters for the economy, because household savings are the main source of funds for investment in India.

2.3 Imports From China Rise 71% as Electronics Assembly Deepens India's Dependence on Chinese Components

THE NEWS New Delhi. After Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Delhi on September 12, India said the two leaders had underlined the need to address each other's concerns, including "structural trade imbalance and supply chain issues". A Data Point analysis by Surendar Singh in The Hindu sets out what that imbalance is. Bilateral trade touched $167.6 billion in 2025. India's exports to China stayed broadly stagnant between 2021 and 2025, while imports from China rose about 71%, from $87.5 billion to $149.5 billion. Nearly 70% of India's imports from China are intermediate goods — inputs such as parts, components and semi-processed materials that go into other products — and another 22% are capital goods, the machinery used to produce goods. The author argues this shows the deficit is not simply Indian consumers buying Chinese finished products but a structural dependence of Indian manufacturing itself. The combined value of the top five import categories rose from $19 billion in 2021 to $34.6 billion in 2025, close to one-fourth of total imports from China, and telecom equipment, laptops and integrated circuits remain among them. India has emerged as a major hub for mobile phone assembly, but the share of imported parts and components in the import basket has risen from 3.3% in 2022 to 10.1% in 2025. The author calls this the "assembly trap" of self-reliance: manufacturing growth driven by downstream assembly — putting together imported parts — rather than by a deep domestic component ecosystem, despite Make in India and the Phased Manufacturing Programme. His prescription is to shift incentives from assembly to technological capability, supplier networks and components, and to use calibrated tariffs on parts and components rather than blanket restrictions. The international context is moving too: The Indian Express reports from New York that US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng began talks on September 20 on tariffs, AI and critical minerals, ahead of a Trump-Xi summit, with a US-China trade truce due to expire on November 10. The syllabus link is industrial policy, trade and the capital factor of production: which machines, parts and technologies India owns and which it rents.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Atmanirbhar Bharat and PLI reward output and sales → firms scale up final assembly of phones, laptops and telecom gear fastest → assembly requires imported Chinese components and machinery → imports from China rise 71% to $149.5 billion while exports stagnate → the deficit becomes structural and is raised at the Modi-Xi meeting on September 12

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The Phased Manufacturing Programme used tariffs to pull component production inward —** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology notified the Phased Manufacturing Programme for mobile phones in 2017. It raised basic customs duty on phones and then, in stages, on sub-assemblies and components such as batteries, chargers and displays, so that each stage of production would become cheaper to do in India than to import. The underlying idea is that tariffs create a protected domestic market in which component makers can reach scale. 2. **Production Linked Incentives pay for sales, not for value added —** The PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing was notified in April 2020, offering an incentive of 4% to 6% on incremental sales of goods made in India over a base year. It was later extended to 14 sectors with an outlay of about ₹1.97 lakh crore announced in the Union Budget 2021-22. Because the incentive is tied to sales rather than domestic value addition, it rewards the fastest route to output, which is often assembly of imported parts; the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme approved in 2025 was designed to address the component gap. 3. **Press Note 3 of 2020 governs Chinese investment —** Since April 2020, under Press Note 3 of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, foreign direct investment from any country sharing a land border with India requires government approval, rather than coming in through the automatic route. The rule was introduced to prevent opportunistic takeovers during the pandemic, and in practice it applies mainly to China. It is one reason why Chinese component makers have been slower to set up plants in India than to export to India. 4. **Where value is added in a global value chain —** A global value chain is the sequence of stages — design, components, assembly, branding and distribution — that are spread across countries. The share of value captured is typically high at the design and component end and at the brand and service end, and lowest in assembly, a pattern often described as the smile curve. A country can therefore show rising exports of a finished product while capturing a small share of its value, which is why the import content of exports matters more than the export figure itself.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Industrial policy and self-reliance are recurring Mains themes —** GS3 covers "changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth" and "effects of liberalization on the economy". Questions have asked whether Make in India has delivered on its

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<tr><td></td><td>manufacturing goals, and this story supplies precise evidence for the gap between assembly and capability.

2. **India-China relations are asked in GS2 through the economic lens —** The trade deficit with China is a standing part of the bilateral relationship, and the September 12 statement on “structural trade imbalance” connects economics to diplomacy. The examiner rewards candidates who can use trade composition, not only the total deficit.

3. **Prelims tests the schemes and their parent ministries —** PLI, the Phased Manufacturing Programme, Press Note 3 and the definitions of intermediate and capital goods are fair game. Transient figures such as this year’s deficit are not, but the design of each instrument is.</td></tr>
<tr><td>PRELIMS NUGGETS</td><td>● The Phased Manufacturing Programme for mobile phones was notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2017 to raise domestic value addition through a graded increase in customs duty on components.
● The PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing, notified in April 2020, gives incentives on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India over a base year.
● Under Press Note 3 of 2020, foreign direct investment from countries sharing a land border with India requires approval through the government route.
● Intermediate goods are goods used as inputs in the production of other goods, while capital goods are durable goods such as machinery used to produce other goods.
● Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan was announced in May 2020 as a policy of self-reliance built on economy, infrastructure, system, demography and demand.
● India holds the chairship of BRICS in 2026, and the grouping’s members include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa along with newer members.</td></tr>
<tr><td>ANALYSIS</td><td>1. **The deficit is a fact about Indian factories, not Indian shoppers —** If about 92% of imports from China are intermediate and capital goods, then most of the deficit is Indian manufacturers buying inputs. Restricting these imports would raise costs for the same firms that India wants to export. This is why blanket measures are counterproductive and why the author proposes calibrated tariffs. The difficulty with even calibrated tariffs is that India competes with Vietnam and Mexico for export assembly, and those countries keep component tariffs low; every rupee of duty on a part is a rupee added to the price of the exported phone.

2. **PLI measured the wrong variable and got what it measured —** An incentive tied to incremental sales rewards the fastest way to increase sales, which is to import components and assemble them. The rise in the share of parts and components from 3.3% in 2022 to 10.1% in 2025 is therefore not a failure of the scheme’s implementation but a consequence of its design. The counter-view is serious: China, South Korea and Vietnam all began with assembly, and component makers follow once an assembly base provides assured demand. The question is whether India is on that path or stuck at the first stage, and four years of data do not settle it.

3. **The bilateral deficit is the wrong metric but the right warning —** Economists rightly argue that a bilateral trade deficit by itself is not a problem; countries run deficits with some partners and surpluses with others. The concern with China is concentration and leverage. When integrated circuits, telecom equipment and machinery come from a single country that has shown willingness to restrict exports — as it did with rare-earth magnets in April 2025 — the deficit becomes a strategic vulnerability, not an accounting fact.</td></tr>
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	4. **Security rules on investment trade off against capability —** Press Note 3 keeps Chinese capital out of Indian manufacturing without prior approval, which serves security. But components require technology, and the firms that have that technology are often Chinese. The result is that India imports Chinese parts instead of hosting Chinese plants that would employ Indian workers and train Indian suppliers. A selective approval regime for joint ventures in components, with conditions on technology transfer and local sourcing, could convert an import dependence into a production base; the risk is that it deepens strategic exposure. 5. **The US-China talks change India's bargaining position —** If Washington and Beijing reach a new truce before November 10, the pressure on global firms to move supply chains out of China may ease, and India's pitch as an alternative weakens. If the truce collapses, India gains as a destination but faces higher costs for Chinese inputs. Either way, India's self-reliance strategy is being shaped by a negotiation it is not part of, which argues for building component capacity while the window of global diversification is open.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's manufacturing expansion remains embedded in China-centric supply chains, creating an 'assembly trap' of self-reliance." Critically examine this statement in the light of the composition of India's imports from China and the design of India's industrial policy instruments. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Use the figures: imports from China up about 71% from $87.5 billion in 2021 to $149.5 billion in 2025, exports stagnant, and the September 12 Modi-Xi statement on "structural trade imbalance". 2. **Body — evidence of the trap —** About 70% intermediate and 22% capital goods; top five categories rising from $19 billion to $34.6 billion; telecom equipment, laptops and integrated circuits among them; the share of parts and components rising from 3.3% to 10.1% of the import basket. 3. **Body — why it happened —** PLI rewards sales, not value addition; the Phased Manufacturing Programme's tariffs raised export costs; weak component ecosystem; Press Note 3 restricting Chinese investment in components; the smile curve of global value chains. 4. **Body — the counter-view —** Assembly is the historical first step (China, Vietnam); imports of capital goods can upgrade capability; the bilateral deficit is not by itself harmful; the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme addresses the gap. 5. **Conclusion —** Recommend shifting incentives to domestic value addition, calibrated tariffs, selective joint ventures with technology conditions, and investment in skills and R&D, so that dependence does not harden into strategic vulnerability.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Joint Secretary designing a new incentive scheme for electronic components. How would you avoid the assembly trap?** ***Approach:*** I would tie the incentive to domestic value addition, measured through verified bills of materials, rather than to incremental sales alone. I would set graded targets that rise over the life of the scheme, so that firms that stay at assembly receive a declining benefit. I would also link incentives to supplier development, rewarding firms that source from Indian component makers. Finally, I would publish annual data on value addition so that the scheme can be judged on the outcome that actually matters. **Q2. A Chinese component maker wants to set up a joint venture in your State, but the proposal needs central approval under Press Note 3. As the State's Industries Secretary, what is your role?**

Approach: The approval decision belongs to the Centre, and the State must respect the security considerations behind it. My role is to ensure the proposal is complete, to make the economic case clearly — jobs, supplier development, technology transfer — and to give the central agencies whatever information they need about the site and partners. I would also discuss conditions with the investor in advance, such as local management, data safeguards and a technology-transfer plan. Advocacy for investment is legitimate only if it is honest about the risks.

Q3. An interview board asks: is a large trade deficit with China a sign of economic weakness?

Approach: Not necessarily; a deficit can reflect the fact that India is importing inputs to produce and export more. It becomes a weakness when the imports are concentrated in critical technologies from one country and when domestic capability in those segments is not growing. The composition of the deficit, therefore, matters more than its size. The goal should be to reduce dependence in strategic segments while remaining open to trade in the rest.

2.4 India's Permanent-Magnet Market Invisible in Statistics as Imports Dwarf ₹750-Crore Domestic Estimate, NCAER Economists Warn

THE NEWS New Delhi. Three economists from the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) — Suvajit Banerjee, Sovini Mondal and Sanjib Pohit, of its research vertical on Computable General Equilibrium modelling, a method that simulates how a change in one sector ripples through the whole economy — argue in The Hindu that India's critical minerals strategy lacks a framework to see where its dependence actually lies. At the heart of electric-vehicle motors, semiconductor fabrication facilities and precision machinery is the high-performance permanent magnet, a magnet that retains its magnetism without an electric current. Ferrite, Alnico and Samarium-Cobalt magnets continue to serve industrial uses, but Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) magnets have become the backbone of the energy transition because no other commercially available magnet combines comparable strength with such a high power-to-weight ratio. India has begun strengthening its critical minerals and rare-earth strategy through the National Critical Mineral Mission, overseas mineral acquisitions, expanded geological exploration and PLI schemes. China's tight export controls on rare-earth magnets and materials in April 2025, the authors write, exposed not only vulnerabilities in global value chains but also the limits of India's understanding. Their central evidence: India's Annual Survey of Industries estimates the domestic permanent magnet market at around ₹750 crore, yet international trade statistics indicate import values several times larger than that entire reported market. The gap may reflect differences in statistical coverage, industrial classification or supply-chain accounting, but policymakers cannot confidently explain where these magnets enter the economy or how they move through it. A magnet passes through a long journey — exploration, mining, mineral processing, chemical separation into oxides, refining into metals, alloying, engineering into magnetic materials and finally manufacture into finished magnets — and each stage demands different knowledge and capability. The authors propose an Integrated Techno-Economic Mapping (ITEM) framework that combines engineering and economic measurement to show where capability should be built, where partnerships are essential and where domestic investment would yield the highest strategic return. The stakes are global: The Indian Express reports that flows of Chinese rare-earth magnets, which US officials call insufficient, are on the agenda of US-China talks that began in New York on September 20. The syllabus link is critical minerals, industrial policy and the capital and technology behind manufacturing.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Energy transition and electronics make NdFeB magnets essential → China dominates processing and magnet production → China imposes export controls on rare-earth magnets in April 2025 → India launches missions focused on minerals and exploration → NCAER economists show statistics cannot trace where magnets enter and move through the economy, so policy cannot target the real bottleneck

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Rare earths are seventeen elements, and the problem is processing, not presence —** Rare earth elements comprise the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. They are not especially rare in the Earth's crust but are seldom found in concentrated,

economically extractable deposits, and separating them from one another is chemically difficult and polluting. In India the main source is monazite in coastal beach sands, which also contains thorium; for this reason monazite is treated as an atomic mineral and its processing is handled by IREL (India) Limited, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy.

2. **The National Critical Mineral Mission sets the policy frame —** The Union Cabinet approved the National Critical Mineral Mission in January 2025, with an expenditure of ₹16,300 crore and expected investment of ₹18,000 crore by public sector undertakings, over the period up to 2030-31. It covers exploration, mining, processing, recycling and the acquisition of mineral assets abroad. Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), a joint venture of NALCO, Hindustan Copper and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Limited, is the vehicle for overseas acquisitions, and in November 2025 the Cabinet approved a ₹7,280 crore scheme to promote the manufacture of sintered rare-earth permanent magnets.
3. **The MMDR Amendment of 2023 gave the Centre power over critical minerals —** The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 inserted Part D in the First Schedule, listing 24 critical and strategic minerals, including rare earths, for which the Central Government alone auctions mineral concessions. It also removed six minerals, including lithium, from the list of atomic minerals, so that private companies could explore them. In 2023 the Ministry of Mines identified 30 critical minerals for India.
4. **The Annual Survey of Industries measures registered factories, not supply chains —** The Annual Survey of Industries is conducted by the National Statistics Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. It covers factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948 and provides data on output, inputs, employment and value added. Because it classifies units by their principal product and does not trace components across stages, a product like a magnet that is often imported inside motors or sub-assemblies can be under-counted.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Critical minerals are now a standard GS3 and GS2 topic —** The syllabus covers the “distribution of key natural resources across the world” in GS1, “infrastructure: energy” and industrial policy in GS3, and bilateral and global groupings in GS2. Critical minerals connect all three, and the examiner has increasingly asked about supply chains for the energy transition.
2. **Prelims tests rare-earth basics and the institutions —** Which elements are rare earths, what monazite contains, which body processes it and what the 2023 amendment to the MMDR Act did are the kinds of statements that appear in Prelims.
3. **Data quality is an emerging governance theme —** The debate over India’s statistical system — survey coverage, base years and classification — has become a Mains theme in its own right. This story shows why statistics are not merely academic: without them, industrial policy aims in the dark.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Rare earth elements are a group of seventeen elements: the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium.
- Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) magnets are the strongest commercially available permanent magnets and are used in electric-vehicle motors and wind turbines.
- Monazite, found in India’s coastal beach sands, contains rare earths and thorium, and IREL (India) Limited under the Department of Atomic Energy processes it.
- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023

	lists 24 critical and strategic minerals in Part D of the First Schedule, for which the Central Government conducts auctions. ● Khanij Bidesh India Limited is a joint venture of NALCO, Hindustan Copper Limited and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Limited for acquiring critical mineral assets abroad. ● The Annual Survey of Industries is conducted by the National Statistics Office and covers factories registered under the Factories Act, 1948.
ANALYSIS	1. **A policy cannot target a bottleneck it cannot see —** If the Annual Survey of Industries puts the domestic magnet market at about ₹750 crore while imports are several times larger, the official picture misses most of the market. Magnets imported inside motors, compressors or electronic sub-assemblies are recorded under those products, so India's dependence on Chinese magnets is likely underestimated. Any incentive scheme calibrated on that baseline will under-size capacity and misjudge demand. Measurement is thus not a technical preliminary to policy but the condition for its success. 2. **Owning the ore is not the same as owning the chain —** The authors' point that a country may secure mineral resources and remain dependent is supported by the structure of the industry: the hard stages are separation, metal-making and alloying, where China has decades of learning and scale. India's mission gives heavy weight to exploration and overseas acquisition, which is necessary but addresses the least scarce part of the chain. The counter-view is that without assured feedstock no processing plant is bankable; both have to be built together, which is exactly why a stage-by-stage map is needed to sequence them. 3. **Relief from China can kill diversification —** When China restricted rare-earth exports to Japan in 2010, Japan responded by financing alternative suppliers such as Lynas in Australia and reducing its dependence. But in many other countries, diversification efforts faded when Chinese supplies resumed and prices fell, because domestic plants could not compete. The US-China talks on magnet flows raise that risk for India: if supplies ease, private investment in Indian magnet plants will look less attractive. Long-term purchase commitments or price support from public buyers may be needed to keep capacity alive through periods of cheap imports. 4. **Another framework risks becoming another report —** The proposal for an Integrated Techno-Economic Mapping framework is sound, but India does not lack mapping exercises as much as it lacks institutions that combine customs, industrial, mining and technology data and are accountable for acting on them. The framework needs a clear home — for instance a shared platform among the Ministry of Mines, MoSPI, DPIIT and MeitY — and legal authority to collect firm-level data. Without that, it will produce a map that no one uses. 5. **Magnets are a test of whether India can move beyond assembly —** The same pattern seen in electronics applies here: India assembles EV motors and electronics using imported magnets, just as it assembles phones using imported components. Building magnet capability requires capital, technology and trained labour at each stage, not only a subsidy at the final one. This is where the four factors of production meet: land for processing plants with environmental safeguards, skilled labour in metallurgy, patient capital, and entrepreneurs willing to compete with established Chinese suppliers.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's vulnerability in critical minerals lies less in a shortage of resources than in the absence of a framework to locate where technological dependence accumulates in the value chain." Discuss with reference to rare-earth permanent magnets, and suggest measures to build domestic capability. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Explain why NdFeB permanent magnets matter for EVs, electronics and defence, and mention China's April 2025 export controls as the event that exposed India's dependence. 2. **Body — the measurement gap —** Use the NCAER finding that the Annual Survey of Industries puts the domestic market at about ₹750 crore while imports are several times larger; explain how magnets embedded in sub-assemblies escape classification and why this under-states dependence. 3. **Body — the value chain —** Trace the stages from exploration to finished magnet; show that India's weakness lies in separation, metal-making and alloying; mention IREL, monazite and the NCMM. 4. **Body — measures —** An Integrated Techno-Economic Mapping framework with a clear institutional home; incentives for mid-stream processing; long-term offtake contracts; overseas partnerships through KABIL; recycling of magnets from end-of-life products; skilling in metallurgy. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that strategic autonomy in critical minerals depends on capability at the hardest stages, not on mineral reserves alone, and that good statistics are the foundation of such a strategy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Director General of a statistics office and learn that official data under-count a strategic product by a large margin. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would first reconcile the data sources — the Annual Survey of Industries, customs records at the detailed tariff-line level and company filings — to establish the size and nature of the gap. I would then publish a methodological note explaining the discrepancy rather than waiting for a perfect estimate, since policymakers need to know the limits of the existing numbers. In the longer term, I would propose product-level supplementary surveys for strategic sectors and data-sharing agreements with customs and industry ministries. Credibility of official statistics depends on acknowledging their gaps openly. **Q2. As a District Collector in a coastal district with monazite-bearing sands, you receive proposals for new processing units. What concerns would you weigh?** ***Approach:*** Monazite contains thorium, which makes radiation safety and waste management central concerns, and its handling is regulated under the atomic energy framework. I would ensure that approvals from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board and environmental clearances are in place before any land allotment. I would also consider the impact on coastal ecology and fishing communities, and hold public consultations. Industrial development is welcome, but only with credible safeguards that local people can see and trust. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India subsidise domestic magnet production even if Chinese magnets are cheaper?** ***Approach:*** For a strategic input whose supply can be cut off, some cost is justified as an insurance premium against disruption. The subsidy should, however, be time-bound, linked to learning and cost reduction, and focused on the stages where dependence is highest. Blind subsidies without measurement would waste public money. The goal is not to replace all imports but to ensure that India can maintain critical supplies in a crisis.

2.5 West Bengal's New Government Clears Land for 33 Industries, Weighs Land Pooling Over Acquisition

THE NEWS West Bengal. Under a new BJP government, West Bengal is once again debating how to assemble land for industry, writes Subhamoy Maitra in The Economic Times column "Das Kapital Formation". The debate uses three distinct mechanisms. Acquisition is compulsory purchase by the State under a statutory framework, where the owner's consent is not decisive. Negotiated purchase relies on voluntary agreement between landowner and buyer. Land pooling allows owners to contribute their land to a development scheme and receive back a smaller but serviced — that is, provided with roads, water and power — and potentially more valuable plot. According to the column, the State has begun examining land pooling, industrial parks and changes to landholding and land-utilisation rules, and is considering ways of making large contiguous parcels available without directly acquiring individual agricultural plots. The government has cleared land for 33 industries, and the land is to be handed over before Durga Puja; the real test, the author says, will be whether these allocations translate into timely project execution, employment and sustained private investment. Bengal's problem is not simply a shortage of land but a shortage of large, contiguous and legally usable parcels: fragmented holdings, overlapping claims and restrictions on land use can make an apparently simple project extraordinarily complicated. Earlier attempts to create land banks from idle public sector land ran into precisely this problem, as available parcels were often too small or fragmented for large investors. The author recalls that two decades ago large sections of Bengal's political class mobilised against industrial projects in Singur and Nandigram, and that many of those actors are now part of the new political establishment or have moved to other formations; the Left Front came to power in 1977 with a clear intention to pursue land reform for the landless. Many of the legal instruments required already exist, he argues, and a new set of laws will not by itself rebuild the State's industrial land bank. Large parcels are rarely available near major cities, so industry may have to move farther out, where land disputes and infrastructure gaps can be greater, and industrialisation must create a stake for local communities. His central line: land can be assembled through legislation, negotiation or planning, but capital can only be attracted through confidence. The syllabus link is land as a factor of production and the institutional credibility that determines investment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Land reform after 1977 creates many small holdings and recorded tenancies → Singur and Nandigram protests of the 2000s stall acquisition for industry → later land banks from idle public land prove too small and fragmented → a new government in 2026 clears land for 33 industries and examines land pooling → success now depends on institutional credibility, not on another law

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Land is a State subject, but acquisition is concurrent** — Under the Seventh Schedule, "land" — including rights in or over land, land tenures and the transfer and alienation of agricultural land — is Entry 18 of the State List. "Acquisition and requisitioning of property" is Entry 42 of the Concurrent List, so both Parliament and State legislatures can make laws on it. The right to property was removed from the list of Fundamental Rights by the 44th Amendment in 1978 and is now a constitutional right under Article 300A, which says no person shall be deprived of property save by authority of law.

2. **The 2013 Act made acquisition slow and costly by design** — The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 replaced the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. It requires the consent of at least 80% of affected families for acquisition for private companies and 70% for public-private partnership projects, a Social Impact Assessment for most projects, and compensation that in rural areas can reach up to four times the market value once a multiplier and solatium are applied. It also mandates rehabilitation and resettlement for those who depend on the land, including landless workers.

3. **Land pooling is a planning tool with a long Indian history** — Under land pooling, owners surrender land to an authority, which lays out roads and services and returns a share of the developed land to them in proportion to their contribution, keeping the rest for infrastructure and sale to recover costs. Gujarat's Town Planning Schemes under the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act, 1976 are the classic Indian model. Andhra Pradesh used land pooling in 2015 to assemble land for Amaravati, and Delhi notified a land pooling policy in 2018; outcomes have depended

	on whether the authority actually delivered the developed plots. 4. **Singur and Nandigram changed the politics of land in India —** In 2006 the West Bengal government acquired about 997 acres at Singur for the Tata Nano car plant; after protests Tata Motors moved the project to Sanand in Gujarat in 2008. In March 2007, police firing at Nandigram, where land was sought for a chemical hub, killed protesters and turned public opinion against forced acquisition. In 2016 the Supreme Court declared the Singur acquisition illegal and ordered the land returned. These events shaped the 2013 Act and the State's later reluctance to acquire land for private industry.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Land acquisition is a perennial GS3 theme —** The syllabus names "land reforms in India" and "investment models" in GS3. Questions on land acquisition, the 2013 Act and its effect on industrialisation recur, and land pooling is an increasingly common alternative asked about. 2. **Land connects polity, economy and society —** The Seventh Schedule, Article 300A and Fifth Schedule protections make land a GS2 issue; its role in agrarian distress and displacement makes it a GS1 and GS3 issue. Answers that connect these dimensions score well. 3. **Institutional credibility is the new frame for investment questions —** The examiner increasingly asks why reforms fail to attract investment. This story gives a clean argument: rules, not incentives, determine the cost of capital, and a history of reversals raises that cost.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• "Land" is Entry 18 of the State List, while "acquisition and requisitioning of property" is Entry 42 of the Concurrent List in the Seventh Schedule. • The right to property is a constitutional right under Article 300A, after the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978 removed it from Part III. • The RFCTLARR Act, 2013 requires the consent of 80% of affected families for acquisition for private companies and 70% for public-private partnership projects. • The RFCTLARR Act, 2013 mandates a Social Impact Assessment before acquisition for most projects. • In land pooling, landowners contribute land to a development authority and receive back a developed plot, which is smaller than the original but serviced with infrastructure. • Operation Barga, launched in West Bengal in 1978, recorded the names of sharecroppers (bargadars) to protect their tenancy rights.
ANALYSIS	1. **Land pooling solves consent but not the problem of many claimants —** In West Bengal, land reform recorded the rights of bargadars — sharecroppers with heritable tenancy — which means that a single plot can have an owner and a recorded cultivator, besides unrecorded workers. Land pooling returns a plot to the owner, but unless the scheme also compensates tenants and labourers, the people who work the land lose their livelihood without gaining a plot. This is precisely the fault line that turned Singur into a crisis. A pooling scheme designed only for title-holders would therefore repeat the old conflict in a new form. 2. **The value of a pooled plot depends entirely on state capacity —** Owners accept a smaller plot only because they expect it to be worth more once developed. That expectation depends on the government building roads, drains and power lines on time and keeping its promises across changes of government. Amaravati shows the

risk: after the 2019 change of government in Andhra Pradesh and the proposal to split the capital, farmers who had pooled their land were left waiting for developed plots. Land pooling is thus a loan from farmers to the state, secured only by the state's credibility.

3. **Credibility is built by rules, not by announcements —** Clearing land for 33 industries before Durga Puja is a strong signal, but investors will ask whether the terms will survive a change in political mood. As the author notes, investors can price an unofficial cost, but it is much harder to price changing rules and administrative discretion. A transparent, rule-based allotment policy with published criteria, fixed timelines and an independent grievance mechanism would do more for investment than faster discretionary allocations.
4. **Opposition politics rewards agitation; governing rewards investment —** The column's most striking claim is that many who opposed Singur and Nandigram are now in the government. Rather than accusing them of inconsistency, it is more useful to note that incentives change with office. The lesson for institutional design is that policy on land should be insulated from electoral cycles, through legislation and bipartisan frameworks, so that every change of government does not reopen the question of whether industrial land can be assembled.
5. **Moving industry away from cities shifts the burden to infrastructure —** Large parcels are available mainly far from Kolkata and other cities, where connectivity, housing and services are weak. That raises the public investment required and makes land only one part of the cost of attracting industry. It also means that the local communities who give up land are far from the urban jobs that industry creates, unless projects are designed to employ and train them. The idea of giving communities a stake — through equity, jobs or annuities — is not charity but a way to make land assembly politically durable.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"Land can be assembled through legislation, negotiation or planning, but capital can only be attracted through confidence." Examine the relative merits of land acquisition, negotiated purchase and land pooling for industrialisation in India, with reference to the experience of West Bengal. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction —** State the current development: a new government in West Bengal clearing land for 33 industries and examining land pooling, against the background of Singur and Nandigram.
2. **Body — the three mechanisms —** Define acquisition under the RFCTLARR Act, 2013 (consent thresholds, SIA, compensation), negotiated purchase and land pooling; give examples such as Gujarat's Town Planning Schemes and Amaravati.
3. **Body — merits and limits —** Acquisition is certain but slow, costly and contentious; negotiated purchase is voluntary but vulnerable to hold-outs and fragmented titles; land pooling shares gains with owners but depends on state capacity and must include tenants and labourers.
4. **Body — the Bengal context —** Fragmented holdings after land reform, recorded bargadars, the failure of earlier land banks, and the need for credibility and rule-based allotment; the location problem of large parcels far from cities.
5. **Conclusion —** Argue for a mix suited to the project, backed by clear land records, transparent rules, community stakes and time-bound infrastructure delivery, since confidence in rules is what finally attracts capital.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q &

Q1. You are the District Magistrate in a district where a land pooling scheme for an

APPROACH	**industrial park is proposed. Many cultivators are sharecroppers, not owners. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would begin with an accurate survey of land records, including recorded bargadars and those actually cultivating the land, since the scheme will fail if it ignores them. I would recommend that the scheme give tenants a defined share of the returned plot or a separate annuity and priority in jobs and skilling. I would hold village-level consultations and publish the terms in the local language before any consent is sought. A scheme that is fair on paper to owners but blind to tenants would repeat the mistakes that made land a political flashpoint in Bengal. **Q2. As Industries Secretary, you have promised to hand over land for 33 projects before a festival deadline. Some parcels have unresolved title disputes. Do you meet the deadline?** ***Approach:*** Meeting a deadline by handing over disputed land would create litigation that delays the projects far longer than a short postponement. I would hand over the parcels with clear title on time and publicly explain the delay for the others, with a firm revised timeline. I would also set up a dedicated team to resolve the disputes, including through settlement with claimants where possible. Credibility is built by keeping honest promises, not by meeting symbolic deadlines. **Q3. An interview board asks: why should a farmer trust the government with his land after what happened in Singur and Amaravati?** ***Approach:*** He should not be asked to trust on faith; the scheme must give him legal guarantees. That means a registered agreement specifying the plot he will receive, a deadline for development, compensation or annuity if the deadline is missed, and an independent grievance authority. Where possible, the returned plot should be allotted before or along with development, not after. Trust follows from enforceable rules, and a government seeking land must accept the burden of proving its reliability.

3. Agriculture & Food

Both stories are about inputs India does not control. Phosphatic fertiliser depends on sulphur that comes from other countries' refineries, now being bombed; ethanol blending depends on grain and cane that also feed people, cattle and poultry, and on water that is running short. Food security today is decided less in the field than in the supply chain behind it.

3.1 Sulphur Import Prices Treble in a Year, Threatening India's DAP and SSP Fertiliser Supply

THE NEWS NEW DELHI. India has staved off a potential food crisis by importing enough urea and liquefied natural gas to allow domestic production of high-nitrogen fertiliser, but soaring prices of another critical commodity, sulphur, are now affecting the availability of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), single super phosphate (SSP) and other major complex fertilisers, The Indian Express reported on 21 September. Since the start of this year, landed prices of sulphur imported into India, meaning cost plus ocean freight, have doubled to $1,050-1,100 per tonne; the headline puts the rise at three times in one year. The main reason is Ukrainian long-range drone and missile attacks on Russian oil refineries and gas complexes, and Iran similarly targeting the energy infrastructure of Saudi Aramco, QatarEnergy and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. This is because only a tenth of the world's sulphur is mined; the rest is a by-product of petroleum refining (56%) and natural gas processing (34%), recovered because environmental rules require removal of sulphur from crude oil and raw gas to make clean fuels. The fertiliser sector accounts for roughly 60% of the 70 million tonnes of sulphur consumed globally each year. Most of it is turned into sulphuric acid, which is needed to break down rock phosphate into a water-soluble form that plants can absorb. “Without sulphur and sulphuric acid, there can be no DAP, SSP or popular complex fertilisers such as 20:20:0:13, 10:26:26 and 12:32:16,” an industry official said. India consumes 3.8-3.9 million tonnes of sulphur a year, of which the fertiliser industry takes 2-2.1 million tonnes. Prices, below $100 a tonne in many months of 2019 and 2020, rose to $400-500 during March-June 2022 after the Russia-Ukraine war, fell back below $200 from late 2022 to early 2025, and began climbing again when Ukraine stepped up strikes on Russian refineries from around August 2025, crossing $500 by December and rising further after the US-Iran war. Import prices of sulphur and sulphuric acid now stand at about $1,070 and $330-350 a tonne, after touching $1,150 and $420 two months ago. Russia has banned exports of sulphur and sulphuric acid, and China of sulphuric acid. Demand is also rising: sulphuric acid used for extracting nickel for electric-vehicle batteries, much of it in Indonesia, rose from 3.5 million tonnes in 2021 to 16 million tonnes in 2025. Iffco, Coromandel International and Paradeep Phosphates have secured rock phosphate through tie-ups in Jordan, Senegal and Morocco. India's phosphoric acid capacity of about 2.2 million tonnes meets half of its requirement of 4.3-4.5 million tonnes, which supports 15-16 million tonnes of phosphatic fertiliser output. Syllabus link: agricultural inputs, subsidies and food security, GS3.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Clean-fuel rules make refineries the main sulphur source → Ukraine and Iran strike Russian and Gulf refineries and gas plants → Russia and China ban exports while EV nickel processing absorbs acid → landed sulphur price reaches about $1,070 a tonne → Indian DAP, SSP and complex fertiliser output comes under strain

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Phosphatic fertilisers are decontrolled and subsidised under Nutrient Based Subsidy** — Since 1 April 2010, phosphatic and potassic fertilisers have been covered by the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme, under which the Union government fixes a per-kilogram subsidy for nitrogen, phosphorus, potash and sulphur, and companies are in principle free to set the retail price. Urea stays outside NBS, with a statutorily controlled retail price and the subsidy absorbing the difference. When input costs rise sharply, NBS rates must be raised or retail prices go up, which is why a sulphur shock quickly becomes a fiscal or political question.

2. **Sulphur is both a manufacturing input and a plant nutrient** — Sulphur is the fourth major nutrient after nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, needed for protein synthesis and especially important for oilseeds and pulses; that is why the fourth figure in a grade such as 20:20:0:13 denotes sulphur. SSP contains phosphorus and sulphur together, and DAP carries 18% nitrogen and 46% phosphorus pentoxide. The same element is therefore both the acid that makes the fertiliser and a nutrient inside it.

	3. **The regulatory frame is the Essential Commodities Act —** Fertiliser is declared an essential commodity, and the Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985, issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, regulates quality, pricing, distribution and dealer registration. The Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers administers the subsidy, and the Department of Agriculture assesses State-wise seasonal requirements. 4. **India's phosphate chain is import-dependent at every stage —** India has limited deposits of rock phosphate, and it imports rock phosphate, phosphoric acid, finished DAP and now sulphur. The report's figure that domestic phosphoric acid capacity of about 2.2 million tonnes meets only half of requirement shows that even domestic manufacturing rests on imported intermediates. Overseas joint ventures for rock phosphate in Jordan, Senegal and Morocco secure one input but not the sulphur needed to process it.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Fertiliser subsidy and imbalance are recurring GS3 themes —** UPSC has asked about the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme, the distortion caused by cheap urea and the resulting imbalance in the N:P:K ratio, and about the fertiliser subsidy's fiscal burden. A supply shock in phosphatic fertiliser adds a new dimension: import dependence and geopolitics, which connects the agriculture syllabus to international relations. 2. **The geopolitics of critical inputs is a new favourite —** Recent papers have moved towards supply-chain resilience — rare earths, semiconductors, energy. Sulphur is a good example of a humble commodity whose supply depends on distant conflicts, and it lets a candidate show that food security has an external dimension.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme, in force since 1 April 2010, covers phosphatic and potassic fertilisers and fixes subsidy per kilogram of N, P, K and S; urea is outside it. • The Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985 is issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. • Di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) has a nutrient grade of 18:46:0 ($N:P_2O_5:K_2O$). • Single super phosphate supplies both phosphorus and sulphur to the soil. • Most of the world's sulphur is recovered as a by-product of petroleum refining and natural gas processing rather than mined directly. • Rock phosphate must be treated with sulphuric acid to produce water-soluble phosphorus usable by plants. • The fertiliser subsidy is administered by the Department of Fertilizers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.
ANALYSIS	1. **The clean-fuel transition quietly made fertiliser hostage to oil —** Because desulphurisation rules turned refineries into the world's sulphur mines, the phosphate supply of an agricultural economy now depends on the health of oil and gas infrastructure. That coupling was invisible when sulphur was a cheap waste product selling below $100 a tonne. It becomes visible only when refineries are bombed. Any serious answer on food security should recognise that energy security and fertiliser security are now one problem, not two. 2. **The NBS design passes the shock either to the farmer or to the budget, and both are costly —** Under NBS, a company that pays three times more for sulphur must either raise the retail price or wait for the government to raise the per-kilogram subsidy. If retail prices rise, farmers cut phosphate and potash use while continuing with cheap urea, worsening an already distorted nutrient ratio. If the subsidy rises, the fiscal cost climbs in a year already burdened by high energy prices. The counter-argument is that

	some price signal is healthy, since it encourages efficient use; but in a sowing season the signal arrives too late to change practice and simply reduces yields. 3. **Securing rock phosphate abroad solved the wrong half of the problem —** Indian companies have built joint ventures in Jordan, Senegal and Morocco for rock phosphate, which was the obvious vulnerability. The industry's own warning is that rock phosphate cannot become fertiliser without sulphur. Resilience planning that secures the raw ore but not the processing chemical is incomplete, and the lesson extends to other supply chains: dependence hides in the intermediate step. 4. **The EV boom competes with food for the same acid —** Sulphuric acid demand for nickel processing jumped from 3.5 million tonnes in 2021 to 16 million tonnes in 2025. This is not a temporary war effect; it is a structural shift driven by battery demand. Even if the conflicts end, fertiliser makers will compete with battery-material producers for acid. Policy should therefore plan for durably higher prices rather than wait for a return to the sub-$200 years. 5. **The domestic options are limited but real —** India's own refineries and the smelters of Hindustan Zinc and Birla Copper already supply some sulphur and acid. Ensuring that domestic by-product sulphur and acid are channelled to fertiliser plants, building strategic reserves where storage risks can be managed, and promoting nano and organic phosphate alternatives where evidence supports them are sensible steps. None of them removes the import dependence quickly, which is why the immediate lever remains the subsidy rate.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's fertiliser security is increasingly determined by conflicts far from its fields." Examine this statement in the light of the recent sulphur price shock and suggest measures to make India's phosphatic fertiliser supply chain more resilient.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the chemistry in one line — no sulphuric acid, no DAP or SSP — and the price movement: sulphur now about $1,070 a tonne against sub-$200 levels before 2022 and between late 2022 and early 2025. 2. **Body — the causes —** Explain the by-product nature of sulphur (56% from refining, 34% from gas), the strikes on Russian and Gulf energy infrastructure, export bans by Russia and China, and the structural demand from nickel processing for EV batteries. 3. **Body — the consequences for India —** Import dependence for sulphur, rock phosphate and phosphoric acid; the NBS pass-through problem; risk to the N:P:K balance; fiscal pressure; and the effect on oilseeds and pulses that need sulphur and phosphorus. 4. **Body — the remedies —** Channelling domestic refinery and smelter by-products to fertiliser use, long-term supply contracts, overseas assets for sulphur as well as rock phosphate, calibrated NBS revisions, soil-health-card based balanced fertilisation and research into alternatives. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that food security now requires an input strategy that is part of foreign and energy policy, not only agricultural policy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Agriculture Director of a State ahead of the rabi season. Dealers report DAP shortages and farmers are queuing. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Get the district-wise stock position from the fertiliser monitoring system and compare it with the sowing plan, so that allocation follows need rather than pressure. Deploy field staff to check hoarding and diversion at dealer points, and act under the Fertiliser (Control) Order where diversion is found. At the same time, advise farmers through extension staff on alternatives such as SSP combined with nitrogen sources,

and on soil-test-based doses, so that scarce DAP is not over-applied. Escalate the gap to the Union government early with numbers, because allocation decisions are made centrally.

Q2. As Secretary, Department of Fertilizers, you must decide whether to raise the NBS rate for phosphorus mid-season. Finance says the budget cannot bear it. How do you advise?

Approach: Put the trade-off on record: without a revision, companies will either cut production or raise retail prices, and either way phosphate use will fall during sowing, with yield and food inflation consequences later. Propose a time-bound, partial revision linked to the observed input price, with a review clause if sulphur prices fall. Suggest offsetting measures such as tighter control on diversion of urea to industrial use. The Minister and Cabinet decide; the Secretary's job is to show the cost of each option clearly.

Q3. An interview board asks whether India should build a strategic reserve of sulphur like its petroleum reserve. Your view?

Approach: The idea has merit because the shock is recurring, but sulphur is flammable and cannot be stored for long, as the report notes, so a reserve would need specialised storage and rotation through fertiliser plants. A more practical first step is long-term contracts and assured domestic by-product supply, with a modest buffer at major fertiliser complexes. I would support a feasibility study rather than an immediate reserve.

3.2 Rising Sugar Prices Revive Food-Versus-Fuel Question in India's Ethanol Feedstock Mix

THE NEWS NEW DELHI. The price of sugar has risen as part of a normal cycle tied to sugar output, but it comes at a time when there is a push to produce ethanol to reduce crude oil imports, and since sugarcane is also an important ethanol feedstock, the rise raises the question of whether ethanol will put pressure on crop supplies, Madan Sabnavis, chief economist of Bank of Baroda, wrote in The Indian Express on 21 September. A feedstock is the raw material from which a fuel is made. In India, ethanol is produced from maize, rice and sugarcane-derived products: around 45% comes from maize, 20-25% from rice, and the balance from sugar-based sources. One tonne of maize yields 380-400 litres of ethanol, rice 370-385 litres and sugarcane 220-280 litres. Maize is also the cheapest, at around ₹20,000-21,000 a tonne, against around ₹38,000-39,000 for rice and approximately ₹37,000 for sugar, so companies prefer it. But all three are water-intensive: producing one kilogram takes 500-900 litres of water for maize, 1,500-2,500 litres for sugarcane and 2,000-3,500 litres for rice, which argues for diverting more maize to ethanol. Maize, however, already has three sources of demand: households, who account for a small part; cattle and poultry feed, where maize makes up 60% of total feed; and industrial use for starch. Ethanol is now a fourth. Because genetically modified maize seed is not permitted, higher output has to come from existing domestic seeds, which could be a problem as ethanol demand rises with E20, the blending of 20% ethanol in petrol, being made mandatory. Higher demand could raise maize prices, which would trickle through to dairy, meat and related products. Mr. Sabnavis wrote that a tempting solution would be to allow GM seeds for maize grown only for ethanol. Surplus rice stocks procured earlier by the Food Corporation of India have been sold in the market; since their quality was low, selling them made sense, but this cannot be the strategy for ethanol feedstock in future. Maize may be preferred because of the higher water use of rice and cane, but incremental maize output will also add to pressure on water resources, alongside the push for data centres that consume large amounts of power and water. Separately, the paper reported that FMCG companies plan to hold prices through the festive season despite sugar prices touching a new high. Syllabus link: food security, cropping patterns, water and energy, GS3.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Crude import bill drives ethanol blending → E20 made mandatory and demand for feedstock rises → maize becomes the cheapest and most efficient source but is already used for feed and starch → sugar prices rise and FCI rice surplus runs out → food, feed, fuel and water compete for the same fields

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The National Policy on Biofuels sets the blending path —** The National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, amended in 2022, allowed ethanol to be made from sugarcane juice, B-heavy molasses, damaged food grains, surplus rice with FCI, maize and other feedstocks, and advanced the 20% blending target from 2030 to the ethanol supply year 2025-26. Oil marketing companies buy ethanol at administered prices that differ by feedstock. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas is the nodal ministry for blending, while the Department of Food and Public Distribution handles sugar-based ethanol. 2. **Genetically modified crops need GEAC approval —** Release of genetically modified organisms is regulated under the Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Micro-organisms, Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989, framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change appraises proposals. Bt cotton remains the only GM crop in commercial cultivation in India; GM mustard's environmental release was approved in 2022 but has been under challenge in the Supreme Court. GM maize is not permitted, which is the constraint the article identifies. 3. **FCI surplus and the Open Market Sale Scheme —** The Food Corporation of India, set up under the Food Corporations Act, 1964, procures grain at the Minimum Support Price for the Public Distribution System and buffer stocks. Stock above buffer norms is sold through the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic), including to distilleries for ethanol at times. This makes surplus rice an ethanol feedstock only when surplus exists, which is why it cannot be a permanent source. 4. **Sugarcane pricing is set by the Centre, with State add-ons —** The Union government fixes the Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, on the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices. Some States announce a higher State Advised Price. Diversion of cane to ethanol lets mills pay farmers more reliably, but it also reduces sugar output in a lean year.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Food versus fuel is a classic GS3 debate —** UPSC has asked about the ethanol blending programme, its implications for food security and water, and the role of sugarcane in groundwater depletion. With E20 mandatory, the question has moved from whether to blend to what to blend it from, which is the angle this article supplies. 2. **Water footprint of crops is increasingly examined —** Questions on crop diversification away from paddy and sugarcane, virtual water and groundwater stress in Punjab, Haryana and Maharashtra appear regularly. The litres-per-kilogram figures here give a candidate concrete comparison.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The National Policy on Biofuels, 2018 was amended in 2022 to advance the target of 20% ethanol blending in petrol to ethanol supply year 2025-26. • Ethanol in India is produced from sugarcane-based feedstocks (juice and molasses), and from grains such as maize and surplus or damaged rice. • The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Bt cotton is the only GM crop commercially cultivated in India. • The Fair and Remunerative Price of sugarcane is fixed by the Union government under the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, on the recommendation of the CACP. • The Food Corporation of India was established under the Food Corporations Act, 1964.

	• Surplus FCI grain is sold in the open market through the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic).
ANALYSIS	1. **Maize wins on every ethanol metric and loses on the one that matters to livestock —** The article's numbers are decisive on yield, cost and water: maize gives more ethanol per tonne than cane, costs roughly half as much as rice, and uses less water than either. But maize is 60% of animal feed. A shift towards maize ethanol therefore transmits fuel policy into the prices of milk, eggs and chicken, which are the cheapest sources of protein for many households. The trade-off is not food versus fuel in the abstract; it is protein affordability versus import substitution of crude. 2. **The GM-for-ethanol idea is weaker than it looks —** Allowing GM maize only for ethanol sounds neat but is hard to enforce: grain moves through markets, and segregating GM from non-GM maize at scale would require identity preservation systems India does not have. If GM maize is to be allowed, it should be decided on its biosafety and on its merits for all uses, through the GEAC, not smuggled in through a fuel-only exemption that would not hold. 3. **Surplus-based feedstock is a transitional crutch —** Selling low-quality FCI rice to distilleries was sensible disposal. But a blending mandate is permanent, while a rice surplus depends on procurement policy and the monsoon. A policy that relies on surpluses will be forced, in a deficit year, to choose between the mandate and the grain market. Making the mandate flexible in bad years, or holding ethanol stocks, is more prudent. 4. **Water is the binding constraint, and data centres are the new competitor —** Every feedstock is water-intensive, and incremental output will worsen groundwater stress. The article's aside about data centres is important: a country that is simultaneously expanding water-hungry crops for fuel and water-hungry infrastructure for computing needs a water budget, not separate sectoral targets. The counter-view is that ethanol reduces crude imports and supports farm incomes; the answer is to count those benefits against the water cost, not ignore either side.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	With 20% ethanol blending now mandatory, the question is no longer whether India should blend but what it should blend from. Critically examine the trade-offs between food, feed, fuel and water in India's choice of ethanol feedstock.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the purpose of blending — reducing crude imports — and the present feedstock mix of about 45% maize, 20-25% rice and the rest sugar-based, as reported. 2. **Body — economics of each feedstock —** Compare ethanol yield per tonne, cost per tonne and water per kilogram across maize, rice and sugarcane, using the article's figures, to show why maize is preferred. 3. **Body — the trade-offs —** Maize's role in animal feed and its transmission to dairy and meat prices; sugar prices and cane diversion; the finite nature of FCI surplus rice; the GM seed constraint; and the aggregate water burden, including competing demand from data centres. 4. **Body — the way forward —** Second-generation ethanol from crop residue, flexible blending in deficit years, maize yield improvement through better hybrids and irrigation efficiency, GEAC-led evaluation of GM maize on its merits, and crop-water accounting at the basin level. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that ethanol should be judged by its net effect on imports, farm incomes, food prices and water together, and that second-generation feedstocks are the only route that escapes the trade-off.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As District Collector in a maize-growing district, you find poultry farmers complaining that distilleries are outbidding them for maize. What can you do?

Approach: Price competition in an open market is legitimate, so the administration should not try to stop sales. What I can do is improve supply: promote higher-yield hybrids and better post-harvest storage through the agriculture department, link poultry cooperatives to farmer producer organisations for forward contracts, and share market data so that neither side is surprised. I would also report the price pressure upward, because the feed cost problem is a policy signal the State and Centre need.

Q2. An interview board asks whether India should allow GM maize to meet ethanol demand. What is your answer?

Approach: The decision should rest on biosafety evidence and a transparent GEAC process, not on the ethanol target. A fuel-only exemption would be difficult to enforce because grain enters common markets. If the evidence supports GM maize, it should be approved for all uses with labelling and monitoring; if not, the answer is to raise yields with non-GM hybrids and to invest in second-generation ethanol.

Q3. As Secretary, Food, you are asked to allot more FCI rice to distilleries in a year when the monsoon is weak. How do you advise?

Approach: Advise caution. The first claim on FCI stocks is the Public Distribution System and buffer norms, and a weak monsoon could reduce procurement. I would recommend allotting only stock above buffer requirements, with a review clause after the kharif procurement estimate, and suggest that oil marketing companies source more from other feedstocks meanwhile. Food security obligations under law come before blending targets.

4. International Relations

Five stories, one lesson: a relationship now binds India most tightly through its rules, not its speeches. Washington has made a tariff threat into a statute; Brussels is writing copyright and child-safety rules that India may have to adopt or answer; leaked papers show that a Chinese state bank in Mumbai took its orders from the Party during Doklam; and Kathmandu wants the 2009 trade treaty rewritten. In each case the text of the law, the treaty or the internal memo decides more than the diplomatic language around it.

4.1 Trump Signs the Graham Sanctions Act, Arming Himself With Up to 100% Tariffs on India

THE NEWS WASHINGTON / NEW DELHI — US President Donald Trump on Friday signed into law the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, The Economic Times reported, giving the President authority to levy tariffs of up to 100% on countries that import large quantities of Russian oil and gas. The House had approved it 262-159 last Wednesday after the Senate passed it last month. The Hindu's editorial called the law "a new and substantially different escalation": the 50% tariff of last year rested on an Executive Order that could be rescinded the same way, whereas this Act of Congress carries "a higher order of legal permanence", and Mr. Trump must justify in writing to Congress any waiver he grants. A waiver, in plain words, is a presidential decision not to apply the penalty to a particular country. The new tariffs would come on top of the 10% 'forced labour' tariffs and the 50% Section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminium; the US takes about 20% of India's goods exports, and there are 30 days before tariffs can be levied. ET columnist Seema Sirohi noted that the waiver is not time-limited and the law has a five-year sunset clause; 152 Democrats voted no. Russia supplied more than 51% of India's oil imports in July (The Hindu); The Economic Times put India's August intake at 2.08 million barrels per day, a 45% share. A senior official told ET that "making India a punching bag for US foreign policy failures will be counter-productive", noting that a Houthi blockade in the Red Sea is cutting off Saudi crude on top of the Hormuz blockade. The MEA said India remains committed to energy security for its 1.4 billion people through diversified sourcing. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, due to address the 81st UN General Assembly on September 26, may raise the matter in New York; Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal visits the US at month-end. The Congress's Anand Sharma urged the government to put the trade deal on hold, calling the move discriminatory and noting that US imports of Russian uranium and fertilisers worth over $4 billion are kept outside the Act. An Indian Express op-ed named the five largest buyers as China, India, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan; Mr. Sharma said NATO members Turkey, Hungary and Slovakia would be spared — the papers differ on who is actually exposed.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Russia-Ukraine war and US-Iran war squeeze oil supply → India raises Russian crude share above half its imports → Congress converts an executive tariff threat into the Graham Act → waivers now require written justification to Congress → India must choose between cheap oil and its largest export market within 30 days

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **An Executive Order and an Act of Congress are not the same weapon —** Under the US Constitution, Article I gives Congress the power to lay duties; Presidents act on tariffs only through powers Congress has delegated, such as Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act, 1962 (national security) and Section 301 of the Trade Act, 1974 (unfair trade practices). A tariff imposed by Executive Order under delegated emergency powers can be withdrawn by another order and is exposed to court challenge. A tariff authority written into a specific statute is harder to challenge and harder to trade away, which is why The Hindu calls this a qualitative escalation.

2. **Secondary sanctions punish the buyer, not the target —** Primary sanctions stop a country's own citizens dealing with a target state. Secondary sanctions penalise third countries that continue to deal with that target — here, buyers of Russian oil and gas. India faced the same instrument under the US Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, 2017 (CAATSA) over the S-400 purchase from Russia. India's stated position is that it recognises only sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council.

3. **The WTO argument is real but weak in practice —** Article I of the GATT, 1994 requires

	most-favoured-nation treatment, meaning a tariff on one member must be extended to all. Country-specific penal tariffs sit uneasily with it, and Article XXI allows exceptions only for essential security interests. The WTO Appellate Body has been non-functional since December 2019 because the US has blocked appointments, so a panel ruling in India's favour can be appealed 'into the void'. This is why India negotiates rather than litigates. 4. **Strategic autonomy is a doctrine, not a treaty —** Strategic autonomy is India's long-standing position that it will choose partners issue by issue and will not enter an alliance that constrains its choices, a descendant of non-alignment. It has no legal form; it is tested only when a partner imposes a cost. Energy is the hardest test because India imports over four-fifths of its crude requirement.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS2 asks directly about 'effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests' —** That line of the GS2 syllabus was written for stories like this. UPSC asked in 2018 about US sanctions (CAATSA) and India's defence purchases from Russia, and in 2019 about the impact of US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on India's energy and connectivity interests. 2. **The India-US trade relationship has become a Mains staple —** Questions on GSP withdrawal, tariffs and the 'reciprocal' trade agenda have appeared in GS2 and GS3. A candidate who can explain why a statute differs from an Executive Order, and why the WTO route is weak, will write a better answer than one who lists grievances.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act, 1962 allows the US President to impose tariffs on imports that threaten national security; it was used for steel and aluminium tariffs. • Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974 permits action against a trading partner's practices deemed unfair or discriminatory to US commerce. • CAATSA — the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act — was enacted by the US in 2017 and targets Russia, Iran and North Korea through sanctions including secondary sanctions. • Under Article I of the GATT, 1994, WTO members must extend most-favoured-nation treatment to all other members; Article XXI provides the security exception. • The WTO Appellate Body has lacked a quorum since December 2019 because appointments to it have been blocked. • The Generalised System of Preferences is a unilateral scheme under which developed countries grant lower duties to imports from developing countries; the US ended India's GSP benefits in 2019.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Act's real power lies in the discretion, not the 100% —** "Up to 100%" means the President may choose any rate, including a low one, and may waive entirely. That makes the law a bargaining chip rather than an automatic penalty: its purpose is to extract concessions in the trade deal and on oil sourcing, as the Indian Express op-ed predicted. For India this cuts both ways. It leaves room to negotiate a low rate, as The Hindu suggests, but it also means the threat can be renewed at every point of friction for five years. A penalty that is certain can be priced; one that is discretionary hangs over every negotiation. 2. **India's leverage is thinner than in 2025 —** Last year the 25% oil penalty was withdrawn as trade talks progressed, which suggested that India could trade market access for relief. This time the Hormuz and Red Sea disruptions make alternatives to Russian crude scarcer and dearer, with oil above \$100 a barrel. Seema Sirohi's point is

	blunt: China escaped earlier pressure because it controls rare earths the US needs, while India controls no comparable chokepoint. India's leverage is its market size and its role in US Indo-Pacific strategy, and both work slowly. 3. **History suggests India will cut Russian imports quietly, whatever it says —** The Hindu's editorial records that India has usually complied with US pressure to cut oil imports from particular countries, "vocal claims of strategic autonomy aside". Iran and Venezuela are the precedents. The likely outcome is therefore not defiance but a gradual reduction in Russian share, dressed as market-driven diversification — which is exactly the language the MEA has already chosen. The counter-view is that the scale of Russian supply, above half of imports, is too large to replace quickly without a price shock at home. 4. **The double-standard charge is politically strong and legally beside the point —** The Congress argues that the US buys Russian uranium and fertilisers worth over $4 billion and exempts European buyers. That is a fair charge of inconsistency, and it plays well at home. But secondary sanctions have always been selective; the US decides whom it punishes. The useful response is not to protest the inconsistency but to use it: exemptions granted to countries 'reducing' Russian gas show that a credible reduction path is the price of a waiver. 5. **The MSME exporter bears the cost that the refiner avoids —** Cheap Russian crude benefits refiners and, indirectly, the fiscal and inflation position. A 100% tariff, by contrast, would fall on garment, leather, gems and engineering exporters, most of them small firms who, as The Hindu notes, could not share the cost with buyers. The trade-off is therefore not India versus America but one Indian constituency against another, and that is how an administrator must frame it.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The conversion of a tariff threat into a statute marks a qualitative change in India-US economic relations." In the light of the US Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, examine the options available to India to protect both its energy security and its export interests. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the development precisely: the Act authorises tariffs of up to 100% on large buyers of Russian oil and gas, requires written justification to Congress for waivers, and follows last year's Executive Order-based penalty. One sentence on why a statute is harder to reverse. 2. **Body — the stakes on both sides —** Energy: Russia above half of oil imports in July, Hormuz and Red Sea disruptions, oil above $100. Exports: the US takes about 20% of goods exports; MSME exporters cannot absorb a 100% duty on top of existing 10% and Section 232 tariffs. 3. **Body — India's options —** Three options from The Hindu's editorial: reduce Russian imports, retain them and bear the tariff, or negotiate a low rate or waiver. Add supplier diversification (Oman's alternative ports, West Africa, the Americas), WTO route and its limits, and linkage to the pending trade deal. 4. **Body — the strategic frame —** Strategic autonomy tested by cost; de-risking rather than decoupling from both the US and China, as argued in the Indian Express op-ed; precedent of compliance over Iran and Venezuela. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue for a calibrated path: a visible, gradual diversification that earns a waiver, while using the trade negotiation to secure a low rate — energy security and export access need not be a zero-sum choice if India negotiates before the 30-day window closes.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	
	Q1. You are Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry. Exporters' associations want a public statement that India will retaliate if the tariff is imposed. What do you advise? ***Approach:*** Advise against committing to retaliation in public before the rate is known, because the Act allows anything up to 100% and a pre-emptive threat reduces the room to negotiate a low one. Instead, prepare a tariff-impact assessment by product line and state, so that the negotiating team knows which sectors can bear what. Brief exporters privately and regularly so that silence is not mistaken for inaction. Retaliatory options should be ready on paper, but used only as a last resort. **Q2. As an Indian diplomat in Washington, how would you use the fact that 152 Democrats voted against the Act?** ***Approach:*** It shows that the Act is not a bipartisan consensus against India but a contested grant of power to one President. That opens a channel to members of Congress who worry about executive overreach and about higher oil prices for American consumers. I would brief them on India's diversification steps with numbers, because a waiver must be justified to Congress and Congress is therefore an audience worth cultivating. The aim is to make a waiver politically easy to justify. **Q3. An interview board asks: "Isn't buying Russian oil during a war simply wrong?"** ***Approach:*** India's position is that it recognises sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, not unilateral ones, and that it must secure affordable energy for 1.4 billion people. European countries also continued to import Russian energy, which weakens the moral argument when applied only to India. At the same time, India has called for dialogue and diplomacy to end the war, and has an interest in its early end. The honest answer holds both: India acts in its interest and argues for peace, and does not pretend the two never conflict.

4.2 Draft India-EU FTA Copyright Chapter Threatens Safe Harbours for ISPs, Students and Libraries

THE NEWS NEW DELHI — The European Commission has formally asked EU member states to approve the signing and conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, and details of the draft Intellectual Property Chapter have become public. In The Hindu, Zakir Thomas, IPR Chair at National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, and Biswajit Dhar, formerly IPR Chair Professor at JNU, argue that the copyright provisions would require amendments to India's Copyright Act, 1957. Their central point concerns the National Treatment clause (Article 10.8). National treatment means each partner must give the other's rightholders the same protection it gives its own. The draft affirms both sides' commitments to the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) and TRIPS but omits the WCT from this clause — while Footnote 1 of Article 10.8(1) extends 'protection' to enforcement against circumvention of technological protection measures, or TPMs (Article 10.18), and rights management information (Article 10.19). The result, they say, is that India keeps the WCT's enforcement mandates but loses the WCT's exceptions for digital works (its Article 10). Limitations and exceptions under the FTA (Article 10.21) follow a narrow 'three-step test' borrowed from EU copyright statutes, so foreign rightholders could challenge India's fair-dealing exceptions under Section 52. Three groups are named. Internet service providers are shielded under Sections 52(1)(b) and (c) for temporary copies made in RAM and server caches during routine data routing, and the notice-and-takedown regime of Rule 75 of the Copyright Rules, 2013 rests on these safe harbours; the draft grants an unqualified right over all "temporary or permanent" reproductions under Article 10.11(a), contrary to the Agreed Statements to Articles 8 and 10 of the WCT. Students and security researchers may lawfully reverse-engineer and test software under Sections 52(1)(ab) and (ac), and Section 65A(2) lets them bypass a digital lock for a lawful purpose without criminal liability; a strict anti-circumvention regime could make them offenders. Libraries and archives that format-shift out-of-print works could lose that right. The authors say negotiators "seem to have gone beyond the Indian Parliament's mandate", invoke the DU Photocopy case, and urge them to re-insert the WCT into the National Treatment clause.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India-EU FTA talks near conclusion → EU secures a detailed IP chapter modelled on its own copyright law → WCT kept for enforcement but dropped from National Treatment → India's Section 52 and 65A(2) exceptions become challengeable → Parliament may be obliged to amend the Copyright Act to fit a trade treaty

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **India's Copyright Act protects users as deliberately as it protects owners —** The Copyright Act, 1957 grants authors exclusive rights but Section 52 lists acts that are not infringement, including fair dealing for private use, research, criticism and reporting, educational use, and transient storage in the course of electronic transmission. Section 52(1)(b) and (c) cover transient and incidental storage by intermediaries, and Section 52(1)(ab) and (ac) permit reverse engineering for interoperability and observing or testing a program. The 2012 amendment added Section 65A on technological protection measures and 65B on rights management information. 2. **The WCT is the internet-era copyright treaty, and India joined it in 2018 —** The WIPO Copyright Treaty, 1996 extends copyright to the digital environment, covering computer programs and databases and obliging members to protect TPMs and rights management information. Its Article 10 allows limitations and exceptions, and the Agreed Statements clarify that these may be extended into the digital environment. India acceded to the WCT and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty in 2018. 3. **The three-step test decides how wide exceptions may be —** First set out in Article 9(2) of the Berne Convention and repeated in Article 13 of TRIPS, the test allows exceptions only in certain special cases that do not conflict with normal exploitation of the work and do not unreasonably prejudice the rightholder's legitimate interests. How strictly it is read determines whether broad educational exceptions like India's survive. A narrow reading, as the authors fear, favours rightholders. 4. **'TRIPS-plus' is the term for commitments beyond the WTO floor —** TRIPS sets minimum standards of IP protection for all WTO members. Free trade agreements often add stricter obligations, known as TRIPS-plus provisions, such as longer terms, stronger enforcement or narrower exceptions. India has historically resisted TRIPS-plus commitments, most visibly on pharmaceutical patents under Section 3(d) of the Patents Act.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **IPR and trade agreements recur across GS2 and GS3 —** The GS3 syllabus lists 'issues relating to intellectual property rights', and GS2 covers bilateral agreements affecting India's interests. UPSC has asked about TRIPS flexibilities and the National IPR Policy; a trade agreement's IP chapter joins both. 2. **Prelims tests treaty names and statutory sections —** Questions on WIPO treaties, the Berne Convention and what the Copyright Act covers have appeared in Prelims. The India-EU FTA makes the WCT and Section 52 likely material.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Copyright Act, 1957 is administered by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade; Section 52 lists acts that do not constitute infringement. • Section 65A of the Copyright Act, inserted by the 2012 amendment, deals with protection of technological protection measures; Section 65B deals with rights management information. • The WIPO Copyright Treaty was adopted in 1996 and India acceded to it in 2018, along with the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty. • The three-step test for copyright exceptions originates in Article 9(2) of the Berne Convention and is also found in Article 13 of the TRIPS Agreement. • National treatment requires a treaty party to give nationals of other parties the

	same protection it gives its own nationals. ● Rule 75 of the Copyright Rules, 2013 provides the notice-and-takedown procedure for intermediaries storing infringing copies transiently.
ANALYSIS	1. **The asymmetry is the whole problem —** Keeping a treaty's obligations while excluding its flexibilities is not neutral drafting; it moves the balance in one direction. The WCT was itself a compromise between authors and the public, with enforcement on one side and exceptions on the other. An FTA that imports only the first half creates a stricter regime than either party accepted multilaterally. If the authors' reading is correct, India would be accepting in a bilateral deal what it would never accept at WIPO. 2. **Trade treaties can amend domestic law by the back door —** The authors' sharpest claim is that negotiators went beyond Parliament's mandate. Under Article 253, Parliament has power to legislate to implement treaties, but the executive negotiates and signs them without prior parliamentary approval. Once signed, a treaty that requires amendment of the Copyright Act leaves Parliament with a choice between amending the law and placing India in breach. That is an argument for parliamentary scrutiny of trade texts before signature, not after. 3. **The ISP safe harbour matters to the whole internet economy —** Every web page, stream or download creates temporary copies in memory and caches. If those copies need permission, intermediaries face liability for ordinary routing, and the notice-and-takedown system becomes unworkable. This is not a student's concern but an infrastructure concern affecting telecom operators, cloud providers and platforms. It is the part of the critique most likely to find allies in India's industry. 4. **The counter-view: stronger IP may attract European content and investment —** European negotiators would argue that stronger enforcement protects creative industries, and that the FTA brings tariff gains for Indian textiles, leather and pharmaceuticals far larger than any copyright cost. The treaty may also contain general language affirming each side's right to use exceptions. The question is therefore whether specific drafting fixes, as the authors propose, can be obtained without reopening the deal. Targeted revisions are more realistic than rejection.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Trade agreements increasingly shape domestic intellectual property law. With reference to the copyright provisions in the draft India-EU Free Trade Agreement, discuss how India can protect its policy space in education, research and the digital economy. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Note that the EU Commission has sought member states' approval to sign the FTA and that its IP chapter has become public; define TRIPS-plus in one line. 2. **Body — what the draft does —** Explain National Treatment (Article 10.8), the omission of the WCT while retaining TPM and RMI enforcement, the three-step test in Article 10.21, and the reproduction right in Article 10.11(a). 3. **Body — who is affected —** ISPs under Sections 52(1)(b) and (c) and Rule 75; students and researchers under Sections 52(1)(ab), (ac) and 65A(2); libraries and archives; the DU Photocopy case as the judicial statement of educational fair use. 4. **Body — balancing view —** Market access gains from the FTA; EU interest in enforcement; the possibility of side letters or interpretive notes. 5. **Conclusion —** Recommend re-inserting the WCT into National Treatment, preserving Section 52 explicitly, and building parliamentary review of trade texts before signature.
ADMINISTRATOR'S	**Q1. As Secretary, DPIIT, you are asked whether the Copyright Act must be amended**

BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	
	after signing. What is your answer? ***Approach:*** I would first commission a clause-by-clause legal comparison of the final text against Sections 52, 65A and 65B, rather than rely on either the negotiators' reassurances or the critics' reading. If amendments are needed, the Cabinet must know before signature, not after. I would propose interpretive notes or side letters preserving existing exceptions. The worst outcome is a signed treaty that surprises Parliament. **Q2. A university librarian writes to you fearing that format-shifting old works will become illegal. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** Explain that the treaty is not yet in force and that Indian law, including Section 52 and Section 65A(2), continues to apply until Parliament changes it. Say honestly that the concern has been raised and is being examined. Invite the library association to submit specific use cases, because concrete examples carry weight in negotiations. Do not offer false assurance. **Q3. Should trade negotiators consult universities and ISPs before agreeing an IP chapter?** ***Approach:*** Yes, through structured and confidential consultation. Negotiators consult exporters as a matter of routine; users of copyright are equally affected stakeholders. Consultation improves the quality of the text and reduces the risk of domestic backlash. Confidentiality can be protected by consulting on issues rather than circulating draft text.

4.3 Leaked ICBC Files Show a Chinese State Bank in Mumbai Froze $185 Million During Doklam

THE NEWS NEW DELHI / MUMBAI — When Indian and Chinese troops faced off at Doklam in 2017, the Mumbai branch of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) "proactively reduced its exposure to loan and investment risks and suspended the disbursement of 11 approved but undisbursed loans and bond investments totalling $185 million", The Indian Express reported (Ritu Sarin) from internal documents reviewed in China Capital, a global investigation led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The same document says the branch "organized Party members across all departments to remain at their posts, actively maintaining communication with the embassy and consulate". The references appear in a 178-page January 2018 work summary of 42 overseas ICBC branches marked "confidential" and "not for external distribution", which says the border situation meant Mumbai met only 57.7% of its net profit target set by Beijing; the suspension cut operating revenue by about $6.36 million. The branch also held CEO tea sessions and one-on-one discussions with local staff during the "tense period". ICBC, with more than $8 trillion in assets, is China's biggest commercial bank; the Chinese government holds over 70% of it. The China Capital dataset of 4.8 million documents, dated 2005 to 2024, came from ICBC's London branch; it was first obtained by the hacking group Hunters International and leaked to the ICIJ, which shared it with 24 media partners and 75 journalists from 24 countries. Agendas from 2024 show a bank 'Party Committee' assigning duties to key personnel. ICBC's Mumbai branch opened at Bandra Kurla Complex on September 18, 2011, as the first mainland Chinese bank branch in India; its assets are nearly five-fold their 2015 level of Rs 1,386 crore, and its top 20 borrowers account for Rs 2,203 crore, or 58.14% of advances, in 2025-26. In June 2018 the Ministry of Home Affairs objected to a proposed second branch, citing more than the authorised number of Chinese nationals employed; none has opened. A separate report (Jay Mazoomdaar and Shyamlal Yadav) says ICBC placed a Cyprus-based Vedanta subsidiary, Welter Trading, on its watchlist in 2016 over a $500 million syndicated loan, in which ICBC's exposure was about $65 million; it was repaid in full in 2017. ICBC did not respond. Doklam, at the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction, saw a 73-day standoff that ended in August 2017.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

China's state owns and the Party directs its big banks → ICBC opens in Mumbai in 2011 as a commercial bridge → the 2017 Doklam standoff turns a bank branch into a political outpost → loans frozen and Party cadres report to the embassy → India learns in 2026 how a foreign state bank behaves in a crisis

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Doklam is a Bhutan-China dispute that India entered to protect the Siliguri corridor —** Doklam is a plateau at the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and China. In June 2017 the People's Liberation Army tried to extend a road in territory Bhutan claims; Indian troops intervened because a Chinese presence there would overlook the Siliguri corridor, the narrow strip connecting the Northeast to the rest of India. The standoff ended after 73 days in August 2017 with mutual disengagement. India and Bhutan's special relationship rests on the 1949 Treaty of Friendship, revised in 2007. 2. **Foreign banks operate in India under RBI licence and supervision —** Under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, a foreign bank needs an RBI licence to open branches, and RBI supervises its operations like any other bank. Since 2013 the RBI has encouraged new foreign entrants to set up as wholly owned subsidiaries, which gives Indian regulators more control over capital and governance. Branch expansion requires RBI approval, and security clearance from the Home Ministry is part of the process. 3. **India screens Chinese capital since 2020 —** Press Note 3 of 2020 requires government approval for foreign direct investment from any country sharing a land border with India, which in practice means China. It was issued in April 2020 to prevent opportunistic takeovers during the pandemic. Following the Galwan clash in June 2020, India also banned numerous Chinese apps under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000. 4. **The ICIJ is the model of cross-border investigative journalism —** The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, based in Washington, coordinates reporters across countries on shared leaked datasets. Its earlier investigations include the Panama Papers (2016), the Paradise Papers (2017) and the Pandora Papers (2021), each of which triggered tax and regulatory inquiries in India.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **India-China relations are asked almost every year —** The GS2 syllabus covers 'India and its neighbourhood' and 'bilateral, regional and global groupings affecting India's interests'. UPSC asked about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and about India's strategy toward China's rise; Doklam itself is a Prelims location. 2. **Economic security is now a GS3 theme —** GS3 includes 'linkages between development and spread of extremism' and 'security challenges and their management', and recent questions have treated economic coercion and supply chains as security matters. This story is evidence for that framing.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Doklam plateau lies at the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and China, near the Chumbi valley. • The Siliguri corridor, often called the 'Chicken's Neck', connects India's Northeastern States with the rest of the country. • Press Note 3 (2020) requires prior government approval for FDI from countries sharing a land border with India. • Foreign banks require an RBI licence under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to operate branches in India. • The India-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship was signed in 1949 and revised in 2007. • The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists coordinated the Panama Papers (2016) and Pandora Papers (2021) investigations.
ANALYSIS	1. **A state-owned bank abroad is an instrument of the state in a crisis —** The documents show that ICBC did what any prudent bank might do in a border crisis — reduce exposure — but also what no commercial bank should do: organise Party members to stay in contact with the embassy. The first is risk management; the second is political

	mobilisation. The distinction matters because China's 2017 National Intelligence Law obliges organisations and citizens to support state intelligence work, and these files suggest the obligation is practised, not merely written. 2. **The freeze was small in money but large in signal —** $185 million is modest for a bank of $8 trillion. Its significance lies in the precedent: Chinese financial exposure in India can be withdrawn at a political signal. Indian borrowers that relied on the branch discovered that credit could be interrupted by events at a border 2,000 km away. For Indian firms, concentration of credit with a single foreign state-linked lender is a strategic risk. 3. **India's regulators had already sensed the problem —** The MHA's 2018 objection to a second branch, on the ground of excess Chinese nationals, shows that security agencies were watching. The leak supports that caution rather than revealing a failure. The harder question is whether the RBI has a framework to treat foreign state-owned banks differently from private ones in crises. That would be a new category of supervision. 4. **The counter-view: engagement still pays —** Chinese capital funds Indian trade, and the branch's profile — corporate banking, trade finance and import-export business — serves Indian companies that import from China. A blanket exclusion would raise costs for Indian manufacturers dependent on Chinese inputs. The argument is for monitoring and limits on concentration, not closure. 5. **The leak method raises its own questions —** The documents were first obtained by a hacking group. Journalism in the public interest can use stolen material, but governments must be careful in acting on it. Evidence from a leak can inform supervision; it should be corroborated before it is the basis of regulatory action.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In an era of weaponised interdependence, a foreign state-owned bank can become an instrument of strategy." Discuss with reference to recent revelations on the conduct of a Chinese bank's India branch during the Doklam standoff. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define weaponised interdependence in one line and state the finding: $185 million in loans suspended and Party members mobilised during Doklam. 2. **Body — how state capital behaves —** Chinese state ownership over 70% of ICBC; Party Committees in banks; National Intelligence Law, 2017. 3. **Body — India's existing safeguards —** RBI licensing, MHA security clearance (2018 objection to second branch), Press Note 3 of 2020, app bans after Galwan. 4. **Body — the balance —** Chinese finance supports trade India depends on; argue for concentration limits, crisis-scenario stress tests for foreign state banks and disclosure requirements. 5. **Conclusion —** Economic security requires de-risking rather than decoupling; India should know in advance how each foreign state-linked institution would behave in a crisis.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a Deputy Governor of the RBI, what would you do after reading this report?** ***Approach:*** I would ask the supervisory department to review the branch's credit concentration and to examine whether the 2017 suspension breached any commitments to borrowers. I would consider requiring foreign state-owned banks to submit crisis contingency plans. Any action must be based on RBI's own verified data, not only on the leaked documents. The aim is resilience, not retaliation. **Q2. An Indian company says it lost a sanctioned loan in 2017 without explanation.**

What remedy does it have?

Approach: If the sanction letter created a binding commitment, the company may have a contractual claim. It can approach the RBI's grievance mechanisms and, if needed, the courts. As an official, I would ensure the complaint is examined and that the bank explains itself. It also shows why firms should diversify their lenders.

Q3. An interview board asks whether India should bar Chinese banks entirely.

Approach: A complete bar would hurt Indian importers and signal that India is closing itself to capital. The better course is calibrated control: limits on exposure, close supervision and security vetting of staff. India should apply to Chinese state banks the principle it applies to Chinese investment since 2020 — scrutiny, not prohibition. The response must be proportionate.

4.4 Nepal's Finance Minister Declares Anti-India 'Jingoism' Over, Seeks New Trade Treaty and Overflight

THE NEWS NEW DELHI — Nepal's Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, an economist and former UNDP official, told The Hindu (Suhasini Haidar) at the end of a three-day visit on Saturday that "the old era of jingoism and equating Nepali nationalism with anti-Indianism is over". He said the new Balen Shah government, in office since March, wants a "reset" and a revision of the 2009 Trade Treaty with India, which he raised with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Nepal wants "big connectivity but thin borders" — which he called the Southeast Asian model not yet emulated in South Asia — so that it can integrate with Indian supply chains. On the Bhotekoshi floods, he said Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority estimates about $1.8 billion of direct damage and around $900 million of losses at replacement value, with reconstruction needs of $4.7-5 billion over three to five years because Nepal will 'build back' for resilience. The Hindu's data desk reported that around 6,000 people remain unaccounted for nearly four weeks after floods that killed more than 1,400. He recalled that after the 2015 earthquake India gave about $250 million in grants and $750 million in lines of credit (LoC — a concessional loan tied to projects), and said energy infrastructure should be rebuilt through concessional credit while roads, bridges and public housing would benefit from grants. On whether India, China and the US owe Nepal climate reparations, as the Foreign Minister had suggested, Mr. Wagle called that line "rather unhelpful" for now, though it would come up at the next COP in Turkiye in November. He said the boundary dispute would be discussed "in a constructive way". On overflight rights for Bhairahawa and Pokhara airports — denied by New Delhi for a decade on security grounds — he said a bilateral mechanism had been reactivated and would include defence officials, while acknowledging "sensitivities" over the Bhairahawa route because of the Gorakhpur airbase. On Chinese-built projects, India had made it explicit that it objects only in sectors from which it procures electricity. Prime Minister Shah will address the UN General Assembly on the 24th, and his first bilateral visit will be to India before the year ends.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Border map dispute and blockade memories feed anti-India nationalism → new RSP-backed Balen Shah government seeks a reset → devastating floods create a $5 billion reconstruction need → Nepal asks India for aid, a new trade treaty and overflight → India's response will test Neighbourhood First

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **India-Nepal relations rest on a 1950 treaty and separate trade and transit treaties —** The Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950 provides for an open border and national treatment for each other's citizens in residence, property and employment. Trade and transit are governed by separate treaties: the Treaty of Trade, revised in 2009, and the Treaty of Transit, which gives landlocked Nepal access to the sea through Indian ports. The trade treaty grants duty-free access to Indian markets for Nepali manufactured goods subject to rules of origin.

2. **The boundary dispute centres on Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura —** In 2020 Nepal amended its Constitution to adopt a new political map that includes Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura, areas India administers. The dispute arose after India

	opened a road to Lipulekh pass on the route to Kailash Mansarovar. Both sides refer to the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, differing on the source of the Kali river that forms the boundary. 3. **Overflight is a sovereign right over airspace —** Under the Chicago Convention, 1944, every state has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory. International flights to Nepal's new airports at Bhairahawa (Gautam Buddha International Airport) and Pokhara need routes over Indian airspace, and India's approval depends on its air traffic and defence considerations. That is why Nepal's mechanism now includes defence officials. 4. **Neighbourhood First is India's declared regional doctrine —** Neighbourhood First prioritises connectivity, development assistance and people-to-people ties with South Asian neighbours. India funds Nepali projects through grants and lines of credit, often via the EXIM Bank. Critics argue that India's approach is sometimes seen as heavy-handed, and that China's Belt and Road Initiative offers Nepal an alternative.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **India-Nepal ties are a standing GS2 topic —** UPSC has asked about the open border, the boundary dispute and China's influence in Nepal. Prelims has tested the Kali river, Lipulekh and the 1950 treaty. 2. **Disaster diplomacy and climate justice are rising themes —** Questions increasingly link climate change with foreign policy, including loss and damage funds and humanitarian assistance. Nepal's floods and its stance on reparations fit this pattern.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in 1950. • Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura were included in Nepal's new political map through a constitutional amendment in 2020. • The Treaty of Sugauli, 1816 between the East India Company and Nepal made the Kali (Mahakali) river the western boundary of Nepal. • Gautam Buddha International Airport is at Bhairahawa, near Lumbini, Nepal. • Under the Chicago Convention, 1944, every state has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory. • India-Nepal trade is governed by a Treaty of Trade (revised 2009) separate from the Treaty of Transit.
ANALYSIS	1. **The 'reset' is a political offer India should accept on its terms —** Mr. Wagle's statement that anti-Indianism will no longer define Nepali nationalism is unusual for a Nepali minister speaking on the record. It is an invitation to show that cooperation pays better than confrontation. The best test is a quick decision on something Nepal can see, such as overflight for one airport or fast disbursement of reconstruction aid. Delay would let the old narrative return. 2. **Overflight is where security and goodwill collide —** India has refused routes for a decade citing security, and Mr. Wagle concedes the Gorakhpur airbase is a sensitivity. Including defence officials in the mechanism is the right step because the objection is military, not commercial. A partial solution — routes for Pokhara first, or specified altitudes — would allow India to protect its airbase while ending the grievance. Nepal's airports cannot be viable without some Indian airspace access. 3. **China policy has become clearer and therefore more workable —** The statement that India objects to Chinese involvement only in sectors from which it buys electricity sets a clear rule. Nepal's hydropower exports to India depend on India's cross-border electricity rules, which restrict power from projects built by entities of countries that share a land border with India and lack a power-trade agreement with it. A clear line

	lets Nepal plan; a vague one creates suspicion on both sides. 4. **Aid is also a competition —** Nepal will seek funds from the AIIB, IMF and World Bank as well as India. India's past pledges after 2015 were slow in disbursement, a common Nepali complaint. If India wants its aid to shape the relationship, it must be delivered faster than rivals'. The counter-view is that India should not compete with China dollar for dollar, but should focus on connectivity and markets where it holds a natural advantage.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Geography makes India indispensable to Nepal, but politics often makes India unpopular there." In the context of the Nepal government's call for a 'reset', examine the steps India can take to rebuild trust. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State Mr. Wagle's message: the era of equating nationalism with anti-Indianism is over, and Nepal seeks a new trade treaty and overflight after floods needing $4.7-5 billion. 2. **Body — sources of mistrust —** The 2020 map dispute, the 2015 blockade memory, delayed projects and overflight denial. 3. **Body — what India can offer —** Fast reconstruction aid, revision of the 2009 trade treaty, overflight through the defence-inclusive mechanism, cross-border energy trade, 'thin borders' connectivity. 4. **Body — the China dimension —** Clear rules on Chinese projects in power trade; competition with AIIB and BRI funding. 5. **Conclusion —** Trust grows from delivery; India should convert the reset into visible gains within a year, before Prime Minister Shah's bilateral visit.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Joint Secretary for Nepal in the MEA, how do you handle the overflight request?** ***Approach:*** I would convene the Civil Aviation Ministry, Air Force and Airports Authority to identify options that protect the Gorakhpur airbase. Options include fixed corridors, altitude limits or phased approval starting with Pokhara. I would share the security reasoning with Nepal privately, so that a refusal is not seen as political. The goal is a decision, not an indefinite review. **Q2. How should India's flood aid be designed?** ***Approach:*** It should follow Nepal's own needs assessment, with grants for housing, roads and bridges and concessional credit for energy, as Mr. Wagle suggested. Disbursement should be quick, with clear milestones and public reporting. Joint monitoring with Nepali agencies would reduce complaints of delay. Visibility of Indian-funded rebuilding also matters for public opinion. **Q3. A Nepali journalist says India bullies its neighbours. How do you respond as an Indian diplomat?** ***Approach:*** Listen, then point to concrete cooperation: open borders, jobs for Nepali citizens, aid after 2015 and now. Admit that some projects have been slow and that India is working to fix that. Avoid lecturing. A respectful tone persuades more than a list of achievements.

4.5 EU's Proposed Kids Act Would Put Under-15s Behind Parental Gates on Social Media and AI

THE NEWS BRUSSELS — The European Union is considering age-based rules that would restrict children's access to social media, video-sharing platforms, AI chatbots and online games, The Hindu (John Xavier) reported, citing Reuters. The proposal, being prepared by the European Commission, is part of the EU Kids Act, aimed at making digital services safe for children. Rather than one rule for every child, it would create tiers of access. Children aged 15 and above could create their own accounts. For those aged 13 and 14, access to social media and video-sharing platforms would require parental involvement: parents could create 'introductory accounts' with restrictions on contacts and time spent. For children between 3 and 12, accounts would be controlled entirely by parents and limited to services considered suitable for children and meeting stronger safety standards. The proposal could ban access to digital platforms for children under 3. The rules would go beyond Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube to cover AI chatbots and online gaming platforms, on the premise that children's internet use is no longer limited to social feeds. Platforms could be required to reduce features designed to encourage engagement and limit exposure to harmful recommendation feeds — the algorithms that decide what a user sees next — to make reporting of inappropriate content easier, and to provide parents stronger controls over content and time. Age verification, meaning checking a user's actual age rather than accepting a self-declared one, could become mandatory when a new account is created, and gaming platforms would have to check age before children download games. Tech companies could also be expected to pay a supervisory fee to fund enforcement. Platforms argue that they already have safeguards, since major apps set a minimum sign-up age of 13; critics say age limits on paper are not enough if platforms cannot reliably determine users' ages. The exact rules could change: the Commission must still negotiate the plan with member states and the European Parliament, and the final rules could look different from the current draft.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Recommendation algorithms optimise for engagement → evidence of harm to children's well-being mounts → self-declared age limits of 13 prove unenforceable → EU proposes tiered age rules and mandatory age verification → platforms and other regulators, including India's, face a new global benchmark

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The EU regulates platforms through a layered rulebook** — The General Data Protection Regulation, 2018 governs personal data and sets a default age of 16 for consent to information society services, which member states may lower to 13. The Digital Services Act, 2022 obliges platforms to assess and reduce systemic risks and bans targeted advertising based on profiling to minors. A Kids Act would add age-specific access rules to this framework. EU rules often become global norms because companies apply them worldwide, an effect known as the 'Brussels Effect'. 2. **India's DPDP Act treats everyone under 18 as a child** — The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 defines a child as a person under 18. Section 9 requires verifiable parental consent before processing a child's data and bars tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children. The DPDP Rules, 2025 prescribe how verifiable consent is to be obtained. The Act regulates data processing, not access to platforms, which is the key difference from the EU proposal. 3. **Intermediary liability in India rests on Section 79 of the IT Act** — Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 gives intermediaries a safe harbour from liability for third-party content if they observe due diligence. The IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 set that due diligence, including grievance officers and additional duties for significant social media intermediaries. Child safety obligations could be added through these rules. 4. **Children's rights have an international charter** — The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, which India ratified in 1992, recognises children's rights to protection and to information and participation. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 25 (2021) applies these rights to the digital environment. Regulation must therefore balance protection with access.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Social media regulation and children appear in GS2 and the Essay paper** — UPSC has asked about the impact of social media on society and on governance, and essay topics have addressed technology and human well-being. The EU proposal offers a comparative model. 2. **Data protection is a recurring GS3 topic** — Questions on the right to privacy and data

	protection followed the Puttaswamy judgment and the DPDP Act. A candidate who compares India's consent-based model with the EU's access-based proposal adds depth.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 defines a child as an individual who has not completed 18 years of age. ● Section 9 of the DPDP Act, 2023 requires verifiable parental consent for processing children's data and prohibits tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children. ● The EU's Digital Services Act, 2022 prohibits targeted advertising based on profiling to minors. ● Under the EU GDPR, the default age of digital consent is 16, which member states may lower to not below 13. ● Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides safe harbour to intermediaries subject to due diligence. ● India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992.
ANALYSIS	1. **The shift from content rules to design rules is the real innovation —** Earlier regulation asked platforms to remove harmful content. This proposal targets design: engagement features, recommendation feeds and account structures. That is more effective because harm often comes from how content is delivered, not from single posts. It also places responsibility on companies rather than on parents alone. 2. **Age verification is the weak link and a privacy risk —** Verifying age reliably usually requires identity documents or biometric estimation, which means collecting more personal data about children. A rule meant to protect children could therefore create large new databases of sensitive data. The design challenge is privacy-preserving verification, such as age tokens that confirm an age band without revealing identity. Without it, the cure may create its own harm. 3. **India's approach is stricter on paper but weaker in practice —** The DPDP Act sets the child age at 18, higher than the EU's 15 threshold, and demands parental consent. But it regulates data processing, not access, and verifiable consent at scale is untested in India. A 17-year-old is treated the same as a 7-year-old. The EU's tiered model is more realistic; India may need age bands in its rules. 4. **The counter-view: bans push children to less safe spaces —** Critics argue that restrictions lead children to lie about age, use parents' accounts or migrate to unregulated platforms. Digital literacy and parental engagement may matter more than bans. There is also an access question: for many Indian children, a shared phone is their only gateway to learning. Regulation must avoid cutting off benefits along with harms.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Protecting children online requires regulating platform design, not merely content." Examine this statement in the light of the European Union's proposed age-based rules, and suggest a suitable approach for India. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Summarise the EU proposal: tiers at 15, 13-14 and 3-12, coverage of AI chatbots and games, and mandatory age verification. 2. **Body — why design regulation —** Engagement features and recommendation feeds; limits of self-declared age of 13; shift of burden to platforms and supervisory fee. 3. **Body — India's framework —** DPDP Act Section 9, age 18, verifiable consent; IT Act Section 79 and 2021 Rules; gaps in access regulation.

	4. **Body — concerns —** Privacy of age verification, circumvention, digital divide and children's right to information under the UNCRC. 5. **Conclusion —** Suggest age-banded rules, privacy-preserving verification and design obligations under the IT Rules, combined with digital literacy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Secretary, MeitY, would you adopt an EU-style age ban?** ***Approach:*** I would study the EU model but adapt it to India, where devices are often shared and identity verification is sensitive. The first step would be design obligations on platforms — default privacy settings, limits on engagement features for minors — which can be enforced under existing rules. Age verification should be privacy-preserving and piloted before being mandated. Consultation with parents, schools and child-rights experts is essential. **Q2. A District Collector receives complaints about online gaming addiction among schoolchildren. What can she do?** ***Approach:*** She can coordinate with the education department to run awareness programmes for parents and students. Schools can be encouraged to set up counselling support. She can report illegal gaming or betting platforms to the relevant authorities. Local action cannot replace national regulation, but it can reduce harm. **Q3. An interview board asks whether protecting children justifies restricting free speech online.** ***Approach:*** Children's protection is a legitimate aim, and reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) and child-protection laws exist for it. But restrictions must be proportionate and should target specific harms rather than broadly limit access. The Puttaswamy proportionality test is the right framework. The best approach limits harmful design while keeping access to information and learning.

5. Environment & Ecology

Three stories that test one question: who speaks for nature when people's livelihoods sit on the other side of the scale. Karnataka is gathering all its parties to resist a conservation map drawn in Delhi, a Supreme Court judge says the court now puts ecosystems rather than humans at the centre, and a reintroduced predator is being moved to a second home because the first could not hold it. Conservation in India has stopped being a matter of whether and become a matter of whose consent.

5.1 Karnataka Opens Special Session, Plans All-Party Delegation to PM Against Western Ghats ESA Draft

THE NEWS BENGALURU. The Karnataka government plans to take an all-party delegation of MPs and MLAs to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convey the State's strong reservations against declaring parts of the Western Ghats as an eco-sensitive area, or ESA, The Economic Times reported. An ESA is a tract notified by the Union government under environmental law in which specified activities are banned or regulated so that a fragile landscape is not degraded; it is not the same as a national park, because people continue to live and farm inside it. The move comes ahead of a three-day special session of the Karnataka legislature beginning Monday, 21 September, in which the State will formulate its response to the Centre's latest draft notification on the Kasturirangan report and also review the drought situation, The Indian Express noted in its daily listing. The Centre has sought States' feedback by 27 September. Under the latest draft, the Union government has proposed declaring 20,668 sq km across 10 districts of Karnataka as ecologically sensitive; the notification earlier said the move would affect 1,449 villages across 39 taluks. Karnataka has consistently opposed the proposed ESA tag, warning that it would adversely impact livelihoods, plantations, farming communities and infrastructure development across the region. Ahead of the session, Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar toured key Western Ghats districts, including the coffee-growing region of Sakleshpur in Hassan, to interact with local residents, farmers and legislators. “We will first understand the sentiments of the people and farmers, as well as the situation of those living near forest areas before discussing the matter in the House,” the Chief Minister said. The paper recalled that the Kasturirangan panel had recommended designating ecologically fragile pockets of the Western Ghats as ESA to strike a balance between conservation and development; while the draft framework exempts agriculture and plantation activities, it seeks to ban or restrict mining, quarrying and large construction or industrial projects. The drought half of the session's agenda is also large: The Hindu reported that more than 200 taluks across Karnataka are likely to be included in the drought-affected list as the government assesses them in phases based on prescribed criteria and ground-truthing, according to Deputy Chief Minister G. Parameshwara. Syllabus link: conservation, environmental impact assessment and Centre-State relations in GS3 and GS2.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Gadgil panel's wide zoning rejected by States → Kasturirangan panel narrows ESA to fragile pockets → successive draft notifications lapse without a final one → latest draft proposes 20,668 sq km in 10 Karnataka districts with feedback due 27 September → State calls special session and plans all-party delegation to the PM

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The ESA is a creature of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 —** The Union government notifies an ecologically sensitive area using its power under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, read with Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986, which allows it to prohibit or restrict industries and processes in a specified area. The notification is first issued in draft, objections are invited, and only then is a final notification issued. Because the power is the Centre's, a State's opposition is legally a representation, not a veto, which is why Karnataka's response takes the form of a delegation rather than a statute.

2. **Gadgil and Kasturirangan disagreed on scale, not on the need to protect —** The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel chaired by Madhav Gadgil reported in 2011 and proposed treating the entire range as ecologically sensitive, graded into three zones of decreasing restriction, with a strong role for gram sabhas. States objected, and the High-Level Working Group chaired by K. Kasturirangan reported in 2013, distinguishing a cultural landscape of settlements and plantations from a natural landscape, and recommending that roughly 37% of the Ghats, about 60,000 sq km, be notified as ESA.

	Mining, quarrying, sand mining, thermal power plants, red-category industries and large townships were to be barred inside that area. 3. **The Western Ghats is both a heritage site and a hotspot —** The range runs parallel to the western coast through six States — Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2012 as a serial site, and together with Sri Lanka it forms one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. It is the source of peninsular rivers including the Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, which is why its forest cover matters to farmers far to the east who will never see it. 4. **Drought declaration is a State decision under a central manual —** A State declares drought following the Manual for Drought Management issued by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in 2016 and revised later. The manual uses rainfall deficit and dry spells as mandatory triggers, and then impact indicators such as vegetation indices, crop sowing, soil moisture and water availability, after which field ground-truthing of crop loss is required. A declaration unlocks relief from the State Disaster Response Fund and, for severe drought, a request for assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Gadgil versus Kasturirangan is a perennial Mains frame —** The GS3 syllabus lists conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, and environmental impact assessment. The Western Ghats dispute has been the classic Indian case of conservation versus livelihood for over a decade, and the 2018 and 2024 Kerala floods and landslides revived it each time. Candidates who can state what each panel actually recommended score over those who treat the two names as slogans. 2. **Prelims asks for geography and legal source —** Questions on which States the Western Ghats pass through, which Act empowers ESA notification, and the difference between ESA and eco-sensitive zones around protected areas are standard. The 10 km default buffer around protected areas under the 2011 guidelines is distinct from the Western Ghats ESA, and the examiner deliberately conflates the two. 3. **Federalism is the new axis —** An all-party delegation of a State against a central environmental notification converts an ecological question into a Centre-State one. GS2 questions on cooperative federalism increasingly draw on environmental examples such as river water, forest clearance and coastal zoning.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Ecologically sensitive areas are notified by the Union government under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, read with Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986. • The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (2011) was chaired by Madhav Gadgil; the High-Level Working Group (2013) on the Western Ghats was chaired by K. Kasturirangan. • The Kasturirangan group divided the Western Ghats into a cultural landscape and a natural landscape and recommended about 37% of the range for ESA notification. • The Western Ghats pass through six States: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012. • Eco-sensitive zones around national parks and sanctuaries, governed by the 2011 MoEFCC guidelines, are a separate category from the Western Ghats ESA. • Drought is declared by the State government following the central Manual for Drought Management, in which field ground-truthing of crop loss is part of the process.

	• Relief for notified disasters, including drought, is met from the State Disaster Response Fund and supplemented by the National Disaster Response Fund under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Centre has the power but not the consent, and that is why the notification never becomes final —** Legally the Union government could finalise the ESA tomorrow; the Environment (Protection) Act does not require State concurrence. In practice every draft since the Kasturirangan report has been allowed to lapse and reissued, because enforcement of an ESA depends on State revenue officials, State pollution control boards and State police. A notification the State will not implement is paper. Karnataka's all-party delegation is therefore not a protest against a law but a demonstration that the enforcing government is not on board, which is a far more effective message. 2. **The exemption for agriculture and plantations weakens the State's strongest argument —** Karnataka's stated fear is for livelihoods, plantations and farming. Yet the draft, as The Economic Times describes it, exempts agriculture and plantation activities and targets mining, quarrying and large construction or industrial projects. If the exemption is real, the livelihood affected is less the farmer's than the quarry owner's and the builder's. The counter-view is that villagers fear what a restrictive regime does to roads, housing and small enterprise over time, and that mistrust of forest bureaucracies is earned. Both can be true, but the answer should separate the two interests rather than merge them. 3. **Scale is the contested variable, and 1,449 villages is a political number —** 20,668 sq km across 10 districts is a large share of the State's forested west. When a notification touches 1,449 villages across 39 taluks, every MLA from the region has constituents inside it, which explains why the response is all-party rather than partisan. The honest policy question is not whether to protect the Ghats but whether the boundaries were drawn with village-level verification. Where they were drawn from satellite imagery alone, the State has a legitimate grievance and a demand for ground verification is reasonable. 4. **Pairing the ESA with drought in one session is telling —** The same session will review a drought likely to cover more than 200 taluks. Drought in a State whose rivers rise in the Ghats is an argument for the ESA rather than against it, because forest cover in the catchment governs the dry-season flow that farmers downstream depend on. That the two items are on the same agenda but framed in opposite directions is the clearest illustration of how environmental and agricultural policy are made in separate compartments. 5. **The Gadgil route of local consent remains the road not taken —** Gadgil proposed that gram sabhas have a decisive voice in zoning. That was rejected as impractical, and the result is a decade of top-down drafts that have neither protected the range nor settled the dispute. The counter-argument is that gram sabhas can also be captured by quarry and real-estate interests. A middle path would let gram sabhas propose boundary corrections within a fixed ecological floor that is not negotiable.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A decade after the Kasturirangan report, the Western Ghats remain governed by successive draft notifications rather than a final one." Examine why the ecologically sensitive area framework has failed to settle the conflict between conservation and livelihoods, and suggest a workable way forward.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Place the Western Ghats in one sentence — six States, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a biodiversity hotspot, the source of peninsular rivers — and then state the news: a latest draft covering 20,668 sq km in 10 Karnataka districts and a special Assembly session to respond to it by the 27 September deadline.

	2. **Body — the two panels and the legal instrument —** Contrast Gadgil's three-zone, gram-sabha-led model with Kasturirangan's cultural and natural landscape division and roughly 37% ESA. Explain that the notification is issued under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act and Rule 5 of its Rules, and that the Centre legally needs no State consent. 3. **Body — why it has not been settled —** Enforcement depends on States; boundaries drawn without village-level verification; mistrust of forest bureaucracy; the mining and construction lobby hiding behind farmer concerns; and the electoral weight of 1,449 villages. Note that the draft exempts agriculture and plantations, which narrows the real conflict. 4. **Body — a way forward —** A non-negotiable ecological floor for the natural landscape, gram-sabha-led boundary corrections within it, ground-truthing before finalisation, payment for ecosystem services to villages that bear the restriction, and linking the ESA to drought-proofing of the river basins it feeds. 5. **Conclusion —** End on the point that a notification the States will not implement protects nothing, so the test of a final notification is not how much area it covers but whether the governments that must enforce it own it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Hassan district. Coffee growers in Sakleshpur are told by local leaders that the ESA will stop them from repairing their estate roads and houses. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** First establish what the draft actually says, because fear is being generated by claims about it. Prepare a short Kannada note setting out what is banned or restricted and what is exempt, citing the draft itself, and have it read out in gram sabhas of the affected villages. Invite written objections and forward them to the State with a summary, because the deadline for feedback is real and villagers who miss it lose their voice. Where the draft boundary appears to include settlements or plantations wrongly, record that with revenue survey numbers so that the State's representation is specific rather than rhetorical. **Q2. As Secretary, Environment in Karnataka, you believe the ESA is scientifically sound but the Cabinet wants a strong rejection. How do you advise?** ***Approach:*** Advise the Cabinet candidly on file that an outright rejection is likely to leave the State with no influence over the final text, since the Centre holds the power. Recommend instead a representation that accepts the ecological case, seeks exclusion of specific settlements after ground verification, and asks for a compensation mechanism for affected villages. Once the Cabinet decides, implement its decision faithfully; the civil servant's duty is to put the evidence on record, not to substitute his judgment for the elected government's. **Q3. Your district has both taluks proposed for ESA and taluks likely to be declared drought-hit. A legislator says the ESA will worsen poverty during a drought year. How do you respond in a review meeting?** ***Approach:*** Acknowledge that the timing is hard and that drought relief must not wait for the ESA debate. Then present the data on catchment forest cover and dry-season stream flow in the district, because the drought is partly a water problem the forests influence. Propose that drought relief works under MGNREGA be concentrated on soil and water conservation in the same catchments, which serves both objectives. The aim is to move the discussion from a trade-off to a sequence.

5.2 Justice Nagarathna Says Supreme Court Is Shifting From Anthropocentric to Ecocentric Environmental Law

THE NEWS NEW DELHI. Supreme Court judge Justice B.V. Nagarathna said on Sunday, 20 September, that the apex court is now pushing for a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach in matters of the environment, The Indian Express reported from a Press Trust of India dispatch. She was addressing the valedictory session of an international conference on “The Future of Environment and Climate Dynamics” organised by the National Green Tribunal, at which President Droupadi Murmu was the chief guest. An anthropocentric approach regards human beings as the central or most vital element in the universe, while an ecocentric approach places the natural environment and ecosystems at the centre of moral consideration rather than just human beings. Describing the Supreme Court's contribution to environmental jurisprudence as “overwhelming and significant”, Justice Nagarathna said, “Environmental adjudication is an exercise in foresight, requiring courts to govern the present with an alert consciousness of the future.” Environmental law, she said, must move away from treating nature as property, commodity or resource. This entails recognising that human interests do not, by virtue of being human, enjoy automatic precedence over the interests of the non-human world; rather, humans bear obligations towards non-human life that exist independently of their utility to them. “In recent years, courts across many jurisdictions, including the SC, have emerged as central actors in giving concrete meaning to the idea of environmental justice. This aligns environmental protection with substantive equality, insisting that environmental governance must account not only for aggregated outcomes but for their differentiated social impacts,” she said. NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said environmental protection must go beyond identifying challenges and focus on building laws, institutions and partnerships capable of responding to emerging threats: “Those with fewer resources often face the greatest risk. Climate action must therefore be inclusive, equitable, and attentive to vulnerable communities and future generations.” Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said environmental challenges can no longer be addressed by a single institution or discipline and require the combined efforts of law, governance, science, economics and society. Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and Power Manohar Lal also spoke. The Indian Express separately noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, delivering the keynote at the same conference on Saturday, rattled off figures on solar capacity and emissions and told the lawyers present that the numbers may come in handy someday. Syllabus link: environmental jurisprudence, Article 21 and the role of the judiciary, GS2 and GS3.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 21 read to include a healthy environment → courts import precautionary and polluter-pays principles → NGT created in 2010 as a specialised forum → climate change recognised as a rights issue → Supreme Court judge articulates an ecocentric turn at an NGT conference

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **The constitutional anchor is a reading of Article 21, not a stated right —** The Constitution has no express fundamental right to environment. The Supreme Court read it into the right to life under Article 21, notably in Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar (1991), holding that life includes the enjoyment of pollution-free water and air. Article 48A, a Directive Principle, and Article 51A(g), a Fundamental Duty, were both inserted by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976 and oblige the State and the citizen respectively to protect the environment. 2. **Three judge-made principles carry most of Indian environmental law —** In Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996) the Court declared the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle to be part of the law of the land as elements of sustainable development. In M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath (1997) it adopted the public trust doctrine, under which the State holds natural resources such as rivers, forests and seashores in trust for the public and cannot hand them over for private use. These three principles are the working tools behind any ecocentric claim. 3. **The ecocentric turn already has a line of judgments —** In Centre for Environmental Law, WWF-India v. Union of India (2013), the Asiatic lion translocation case, the Court said that environmental justice could be achieved only by moving from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach and that the survival of a species has intrinsic value. In M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India (2024), the Great Indian Bustard case, the Court recognised a right against the adverse effects of climate change flowing from Articles 14 and 21. Justice Nagarathna's remarks sit on this line rather than

	inventing it. 4. **The NGT is a statutory tribunal with a defined mandate —** The National Green Tribunal was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection, conservation of forests and other natural resources. Section 20 of the Act directs it to apply the principles of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle. It is chaired by a retired Supreme Court judge or High Court Chief Justice, and appeals from it lie directly to the Supreme Court.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Environmental jurisprudence is set under both GS2 and GS3 —** UPSC has asked about the role of the judiciary in environmental governance, the powers of the NGT and the tension between judicial activism and executive policy. A speech by a sitting judge is not itself a ruling, but it signals the direction of reasoning, and the examiner rewards candidates who can name the cases the reasoning rests on. 2. **Ethics papers use ecocentrism directly —** GS4 has asked about environmental ethics and the moral standing of non-human life. The anthropocentric-ecocentric distinction defined in this report is exactly the vocabulary those questions expect, and it pairs well with deep ecology and with Indian traditions of reverence for nature. 3. **Rights of nature is a recurring essay theme —** The Uttarakhand High Court's 2017 declaration of the Ganga and Yamuna as living entities, later stayed by the Supreme Court, and similar moves abroad make the legal personhood of nature a live essay and interview topic.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 48A (Directive Principle) and Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duty) on protection of the environment were inserted by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976. • The Supreme Court read the right to a pollution-free environment into Article 21 in Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar (1991). • The precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle were held to be part of Indian law in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996). • The public trust doctrine was adopted by the Supreme Court in M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath (1997). • The National Green Tribunal was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010; Section 20 requires it to apply sustainable development, precautionary and polluter pays principles. • Appeals against orders of the National Green Tribunal lie to the Supreme Court. • An anthropocentric approach treats human beings as the central element of moral concern; an ecocentric approach places ecosystems and the natural environment at the centre.
ANALYSIS	1. **An ecocentric principle is easy to state and hard to apply in a poor country —** If humans do not enjoy automatic precedence over the non-human world, then a court weighing a dam, a mine or a highway must give weight to species and habitats that cannot speak. That is coherent philosophy. The practical difficulty is that the people displaced or left without work by such a weighing are usually the poorest, who also cannot easily reach the court. Justice Nagarathna's own linkage of environmental justice to substantive equality is the necessary corrective: an ecocentric law that ignores differentiated social impacts would simply relocate the costs of conservation onto the vulnerable. 2. **The courts have been ahead of the legislature, and that is both a strength and a risk**

	— Nearly every core principle of Indian environmental law came from judgments rather than statutes. That filled a real vacuum, but it also means the rules shift with benches and are enforced through continuing mandamus rather than institutions. The counter-view is that without judicial push there would be no Taj Trapezium, no CNG in Delhi's buses and no forest conservation regime worth the name. The better conclusion is that judicial doctrine now needs legislative codification, so that an ecocentric standard does not depend on which judge hears the case. 3. **Foresight is the most useful phrase in the speech —** Describing adjudication as governing the present with consciousness of the future implies inter-generational equity, which is harder for courts than it sounds: future generations are not parties, and the harm is probabilistic. The Great Indian Bustard case showed the tension, as the Court first ordered undergrounding of power lines across a large area and then modified the order when the cost to renewable energy targets became clear. Foresight in practice means weighing one future good against another, not only the future against the present. 4. **The government and the judiciary spoke in different registers at the same event —** The Prime Minister's keynote emphasised solar capacity and avoided emissions; the judge spoke of the moral standing of nature. These are not contradictory, but they reflect two theories of environmental policy — one of growth made cleaner, the other of limits. Much of India's future environmental litigation, from solar parks on grasslands to hydropower in the Himalaya, will sit exactly where these two theories collide.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“The Supreme Court is pushing for a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach in environmental matters.” Discuss the evolution of environmental jurisprudence in India and examine whether an ecocentric approach can be reconciled with the development needs of the poor.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define the two approaches exactly as the report does and attribute the statement to Justice B.V. Nagarathna at the NGT's international conference, noting that it is a signal of judicial reasoning rather than a ruling. 2. **Body — the evolution —** Trace Article 21 (Subhash Kumar, 1991), the precautionary and polluter pays principles (Vellore, 1996), the public trust doctrine (Kamal Nath, 1997), the NGT Act 2010 and Section 20, the ecocentric statement in the lion translocation case (2013) and the climate-rights recognition in M.K. Ranjitsinh (2024). 3. **Body — the tension with development —** Explain how conservation costs fall disproportionately on forest dwellers, fishers and farmers, use the judge's own point on substantive equality and differentiated impacts, and give an example of a court modifying an order when costs to other public goods became clear. 4. **Body — reconciliation —** Codification of judicial principles in statute, compensation and benefit-sharing with affected communities, Forest Rights Act recognition as an ally of conservation, and strengthening regulators so that courts are not the first responders. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that ecocentrism and equity are compatible only if the price of protecting nature is paid by the society that benefits, not by the communities living closest to it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Member Secretary of a State Pollution Control Board, you receive an NGT order that relies on ecocentric reasoning to shut a cluster of small units that employ several thousand workers. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Comply with the order without delay, because a tribunal's direction is

binding and partial compliance invites contempt. At the same time, prepare a factual compliance plan that shows which units can meet standards with specific investments and in what time, and place it before the tribunal with a request for phased reopening of compliant units. Coordinate with the labour department on the workers' dues and interim support. The purpose is to obey the order while giving the tribunal the information it needs to calibrate it.

Q2. An interview board asks you whether a river or a forest should have legal rights of its own. What is your view?

Approach: Legal personhood for nature is a useful idea because it gives standing to interests that otherwise have no one to represent them. But personhood without a clear guardian, a budget and an enforcement mechanism risks being symbolic, as the stay on the Uttarakhand High Court's Ganga and Yamuna order showed. I would prefer strengthening existing tools — the public trust doctrine, environmental impact assessment and the NGT — while experimenting with guardianship for specific ecosystems where a responsible body can be named.

Q3. As a District Magistrate, you must decide on a quarry lease near a wildlife corridor that has no formal protected status. The applicant meets every legal requirement. How do you apply the principle discussed by the judge?

Approach: Legality is the minimum, not the whole decision. I would seek the forest department's written assessment of the corridor and the cumulative impact of existing quarries, and invoke the precautionary principle recognised by the Supreme Court if the evidence of harm is credible. If I decide to refuse or impose conditions, I would record reasons in a speaking order so that it can withstand appeal. A decision grounded in documented ecological evidence is defensible; one grounded in personal preference is not.

5.3 Botswana Cheetah CCB-2 Released at Gandhi Sagar as Kuno Births Take India's Count to 56

THE NEWS BHOPAL. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday, 20 September, released CCB-2, a female cheetah brought to India from Botswana, into Gandhi Sagar, The Indian Express reported. CCB-2, around three years old, was relocated from Kuno National Park in the Gwalior-Chambal region of the State. With her arrival Gandhi Sagar now has four cheetahs, two males and two females. Wildlife officials hope CCB-2 will help start a new family of cheetahs, since the existing female at the site has so far failed to mate with the two males there. Gandhi Sagar, spread across the Mandsaur-Neemuch region along the Madhya Pradesh-Rajasthan border, became the country's second cheetah habitat when two male cheetahs, Pawak and Prabhas, were moved there from Kuno in April 2025. The paper refers to the site both as a national park and as a wildlife sanctuary. Speaking after the release, Mr. Yadav said the relocation was part of the State's continuing efforts to strengthen cheetah conservation under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Project Cheetah, the programme to bring back to India a large cat that had become extinct in the country. He described the programme as significant not only for Madhya Pradesh but for Asia, pointing out that the cheetah had disappeared from the Asian landscape and had also become extinct in India. “It is a matter of good fortune for us that cheetahs are once again roaming freely on the soil of Madhya Pradesh,” he said, according to the State government's statement, adding that the return of the species reflected the State's ethos of ‘live and let live’. The release came two days after a significant moment for the project: on 18 September an India-born female cheetah, KGP12, gave birth to four cubs at Kuno. The birth was notable because KGP12 was herself born in India to a cheetah brought from South Africa, which makes her cubs part of a second generation born on Indian soil. The latest births took India's total cheetah population to 56, according to reports citing forest officials and the Union Environment Ministry. Syllabus link: species reintroduction, protected-area management and biodiversity conservation, GS3.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Cheetah hunted to extinction in India by the mid-twentieth century → Project Cheetah imports African cheetahs to Kuno from 2022 → Kuno's space and prey limits force a second site → males moved to Gandhi Sagar in April 2025 → a Botswana female is added as Kuno records second-generation births and a count of 56

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The cheetah is the only large mammal India lost after Independence —** The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952, having been hunted and captured for coursing and having lost its grassland habitat. The Asiatic subspecies survives only in Iran and is critically endangered, which is why India turned to African cheetahs. The species as a whole is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and is protected in India under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. 2. **Project Cheetah began at Kuno in September 2022 —** Under the Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India, eight cheetahs from Namibia were released into Kuno National Park in Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh on 17 September 2022, followed by twelve from South Africa in February 2023. The project is implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority with the Wildlife Institute of India and the State forest department. Kuno was upgraded from a wildlife sanctuary to a national park in 2018. 3. **The NTCA is a statutory body —** The National Tiger Conservation Authority was constituted under Section 38L of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, inserted by the 2006 amendment, and is chaired by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Its handling of Project Cheetah, although the cheetah is not a tiger, reflects its role as India's principal big-cat management agency. 4. **Gandhi Sagar sits on the Chambal —** Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary lies in Mandsaur and Neemuch districts of Madhya Pradesh along the border with Rajasthan, around the reservoir of the Gandhi Sagar dam on the Chambal river. Its mix of open grassland and dry forest was one of the reasons it was chosen as the second cheetah site, and a Kuno-Gandhi Sagar landscape spanning Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is envisaged for the project.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Project Cheetah is a Prelims staple —** Questions on the source countries, the release site, the year of extinction, the IUCN status and the subspecies distinction appear regularly. Candidates confuse Kuno's earlier proposed role for the Asiatic lion with its current role for the cheetah, and the examiner exploits that. 2. **Mains asks about reintroduction as a conservation tool —** Under 'conservation' in GS3, a question on the merits and risks of translocating a species from another continent is well within the syllabus. Mortality in the early years, the adequacy of prey and space, and the choice of cheetah over the long-pending relocation of lions to Kuno give material for a balanced answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952. • The Asiatic cheetah (Acinonyx jubatus venaticus) survives in the wild only in Iran; the cheetahs brought under Project Cheetah are African. • Under Project Cheetah, cheetahs from Namibia were released into Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh, on 17 September 2022, followed by a batch from South Africa in 2023. • Project Cheetah is implemented by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, a statutory body under Section 38L of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. • Gandhi Sagar, on the Chambal river in Mandsaur and Neemuch districts of Madhya Pradesh, is India's second cheetah habitat after Kuno. • The cheetah is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

ANALYSIS	1. **A second site is a sign of the first site's limits, not only of success —** Moving cheetahs to Gandhi Sagar is presented as expansion, but it also answers a problem visible at Kuno: an unfenced park of limited size cannot hold a growing population of a wide-ranging predator without animals straying into villages. A second site spreads risk from disease or disaster. The logic is sound, but the answer should say plainly that a network of sites is a necessity for the project, not an embellishment. 2. **Second-generation births are the first real test the project has passed —** Imported adults surviving is a husbandry achievement; cubs born to an India-born mother show that the animals can complete a life cycle here. KGP12's four cubs are therefore more significant than the headline count of 56. The counter-view is that survival of cubs to adulthood, and breeding without supplementary feeding or intensive monitoring, remain unproven, and a count that includes young cubs is fragile. 3. **Breeding failure at Gandhi Sagar shows how small numbers make management intrusive —** The existing female has not mated with the two males, so a new female is brought in. With four animals, every individual matters and every relationship is managed. That is unavoidable at founder stage, but it means the population is still a managed collection rather than a wild one. The measure of success in a decade will be how little intervention it needs. 4. **The cheetah's case rests on grasslands more than on the cat —** The best argument for the project is that it gives political attention to open grasslands and savannas, which India's forest law has historically classified as wastelands and diverted to plantations, solar parks and industry. If the cheetah protects that ecosystem, its cost is justified; if it becomes a flagship for enclosures while grasslands elsewhere are lost, it is not.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine the ecological rationale and the risks of reintroducing the African cheetah in India. Has the establishment of a second habitat at Gandhi Sagar strengthened the case for the programme?
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the extinction in 1952, the launch at Kuno in September 2022, and today's position: four cheetahs at Gandhi Sagar and a national count of 56 after second-generation births. 2. **Body — the rationale —** Restoration of a lost species, grassland conservation, ecotourism and livelihoods, and global conservation diplomacy with Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. 3. **Body — the risks —** Adaptation of African animals to Indian conditions, mortality, limited space and prey at Kuno, human-wildlife conflict when animals stray, cost, and the opportunity cost of the pending lion relocation. 4. **Body — the significance of Gandhi Sagar —** Risk spreading, a metapopulation across Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and the difficulty shown by the failed pairing at the new site. Link to the KGP12 births as evidence of reproductive viability. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the programme's success should be measured by self-sustaining wild breeding and by protected grassland area, not by headcount.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Divisional Forest Officer at Gandhi Sagar. A cheetah strays into farmland and villagers gather with sticks. What do you do in the first hour?** ***Approach:*** Get the response team and veterinarian to the spot and ask the local police to keep the crowd at a distance, because both the animal and the villagers are at risk. Speak to the villagers directly, explain that the cheetah rarely attacks people and that the team will move it, and ask elders to help hold the crowd back. Once the animal is safe, record any livestock loss and process compensation quickly, since prompt payment is what keeps villagers willing to tolerate the next straying.

Q2. An interviewer says that the money spent on Project Cheetah would be better spent on the Asiatic lion or the Great Indian Bustard. How do you respond?

Approach: The point about priorities is fair; conservation budgets are limited, and the lion's single-population risk in Gir and the bustard's collapse are serious. But the choices are not strictly substitutable, because the cheetah project brings attention and money to grasslands that also host the bustard and other species. I would argue for evaluating the project on whether it protects grassland habitat and keeps public commitments to other endangered species on schedule, rather than on its own headcount.

Q3. As Secretary, Forests in Madhya Pradesh, you are asked to announce a third cheetah site before the next tourist season. The scientific assessment is incomplete. What is your advice?

Approach: Advise that an announcement can be made only as a proposal subject to assessment of prey base, space and community consultation. Releasing animals into an unprepared site would risk deaths that damage the entire programme. Give the government a realistic timeline with milestones it can announce, which serves the political need without committing to a premature release.

6. Health & Life Sciences

Three stories about the diseases that now fill Indian hospitals — not infections but hypertension, heart disease and dementia — and about the prices and systems that stand between patients and care. A State is trying to change what goes into the cooking pot, an industry body wants to change what goes on a pacemaker's price tag, and a geriatrician argues that dementia care must begin at home long before the neurologist. The common lesson is that chronic disease is won or lost outside the hospital.

6.1 Tamil Nadu Plans First Statewide Urine Survey and Salt Cut in Government Kitchens to Curb Hypertension

THE NEWS CHENNAI. Tamil Nadu Health Minister K.G. Arunraj has announced in the Assembly plans for a multi-pronged mission to reduce salt intake in the State, The Hindu reported in an analysis by Ramya Kannan on 21 September. For the first time, a Statewide survey using urine samples will scientifically measure how much salt people actually consume; measuring the sodium passed in urine is more reliable than asking people what they eat. Salt will be gradually reduced in government-run kitchens, including the Nutritious Meal Programme, ICDS centres, government hospitals and hostels. The feasibility of introducing a low-sodium salt substitute will be examined. This will be backed by a Statewide awareness campaign on how to read labels on packages, tasting food before adding salt and using natural flavour enhancers. The State also intends to step up hypertension control through its community health outreach programme Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam and other public institutions; people diagnosed with hypertension will receive systematic counselling and anti-hypertension drugs. Surveys by the Indian Council of Medical Research show that men in India consume an average of 8.9 gm of salt daily and women about 7.1 gm. The World Health Organization recommends keeping intake under 5 gm a day and in January 2025 released guidelines recommending lower-sodium salt substitutes. In Tamil Nadu, hypertension is a major public health concern: a 2024 study by Selvavinayagam T.S. and others found adult hypertension prevalence of around 33.9%, well above the national average of 28.5%. Excess salt makes the body retain water, which increases blood volume and pressure on artery walls, leading to clinical hypertension. Researchers of a randomised, double-blind, controlled trial reported in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in 2021 wrote that replacing salt with a reduced-sodium, added-potassium substitute was an acceptable and effective way to lower systolic blood pressure in people with hypertension in rural India. The Sapiens Health Foundation welcomed the campaign; its founder Rajan Ravichandran recalled that a 2005 campaign initiated by Graham MacGregor of World Action on Salt, Sugar and Health resulted in a reported 30% reduction of salt in bread in the U.K. G. Sengottuvelu, senior interventional cardiologist at Apollo Hospitals, said excess salt is one of the most important and preventable contributors to high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke, and that Indians' preference for salty food is largely an acquired habit that the palate can unlearn when salt is gradually reduced. Syllabus link: non-communicable diseases and public health policy, GS2.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Salt habit acquired in childhood → Indian men average 8.9 gm and women 7.1 gm a day against WHO's 5 gm → water retention raises blood pressure → Tamil Nadu adult hypertension at about 33.9% → State plans urine survey, salt cut in public kitchens and low-sodium substitutes

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Non-communicable diseases are now India's main killer —** Cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes account for the majority of deaths in India. The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke, launched in 2010, was renamed the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in 2023. Population-based screening of adults aged 30 and above for hypertension, diabetes and common cancers is carried out through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, the rebranded health and wellness centres.

2. **The WHO salt benchmark and global target —** The WHO recommends that adults consume less than 5 gm of salt a day, which is less than 2 gm of sodium. Under the Global Monitoring Framework for NCDs adopted in 2013, member States committed to a 30% relative reduction in mean population salt intake. The 24-hour urinary sodium test is regarded as the gold standard for measuring intake because most salt consumed is excreted in urine.

	3. **India has built a hypertension control architecture —** The India Hypertension Control Initiative, begun in 2017 by the Union Health Ministry, ICMR, WHO India and State governments, promotes standard treatment protocols, drug supply and patient follow-up. SDG target 3.4 calls for reducing premature mortality from NCDs by one-third by 2030. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, runs the Eat Right India movement, which includes messaging to reduce salt, sugar and fat. 4. **Public health is a State subject, and Tamil Nadu has used that space —** Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries appear as entry 6 in the State List of the Seventh Schedule, while Article 47 directs the State to raise the level of nutrition and improve public health. Tamil Nadu's Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam, launched in 2021, delivers NCD screening and medicines to people's homes, and its Nutritious Meal Programme is among the country's oldest school feeding schemes, which gives the State ready channels for a salt campaign.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **NCDs and preventive health are asked under GS2 —** The syllabus covers issues relating to the development and management of the social sector relating to health. UPSC has asked about the rising NCD burden, lifestyle diseases and the shift from curative to preventive care. A State-level salt campaign is a concrete example of population-level prevention that candidates can cite. 2. **Nudges and behavioural policy are a recurring theme —** Questions on behavioural economics in public policy, and on changing food habits through reformulation and labelling, have appeared in GS2 and in the essay paper. Changing the default in public kitchens is a textbook nudge.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The WHO recommends a salt intake of less than 5 gm per day for adults, equivalent to less than 2 gm of sodium. • The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (2010) was renamed the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in 2023. • The India Hypertension Control Initiative was launched in 2017 by the Union Health Ministry, ICMR, WHO India and State governments. • SDG target 3.4 seeks a one-third reduction in premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by 2030. • Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam is Tamil Nadu's doorstep health programme for screening and treatment of non-communicable diseases. • Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries is entry 6 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule. • The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a statutory body under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
ANALYSIS	1. **Measuring before acting is the most important part of the plan —** Most Indian salt figures come from dietary recall, which underestimates intake because people cannot count salt in pickles, papads and packaged snacks. A Statewide urine-based survey gives a baseline that can be re-measured, which is the only way to know whether the campaign works. Programmes that skip the baseline end up reporting activities, not outcomes. This design choice deserves more attention than the awareness campaign. 2. **Changing the default in public kitchens reaches people who never read labels —** Label-reading campaigns work best with literate, urban, packaged-food consumers. Reducing salt in the Nutritious Meal Programme, ICDS centres, hospitals and hostels changes what millions eat without requiring them to decide anything, and shapes

	children's palates early — which matters if, as the cardiologist says, the taste for salt is acquired in childhood. The counter-concern is acceptability: if meals become bland and children eat less, nutrition suffers. Gradual reduction, as planned, is the right approach. 3. **Salt substitutes carry a real but manageable risk —** Reduced-sodium, added-potassium salt lowers blood pressure, as the trial in rural India found. But extra potassium can be dangerous for people with advanced kidney disease or on certain medicines. That is why the State is right to examine feasibility rather than roll it out. A sensible approach would offer substitutes in public kitchens and markets with clear labelling, while ensuring that people on kidney care get medical advice. 4. **The bigger lever is industry reformulation, which a State cannot fully control —** The U.K. example cited was a reduction in salt in bread, achieved by working with manufacturers. In India, much salt comes from home cooking, but a growing share comes from processed foods sold nationally. A State can change its own kitchens and campaigns; limits on salt in packaged foods and front-of-pack warning labels need FSSAI. Tamil Nadu's campaign is therefore necessary but not sufficient, and it strengthens the case for national standards.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Hypertension in India is a disease of habit, and habit is a public health lever." Examine the role of population-level salt reduction in controlling non-communicable diseases, with reference to Tamil Nadu's recent initiative.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Give the burden: ICMR averages of 8.9 gm salt for men and 7.1 gm for women against the WHO limit of 5 gm, and adult hypertension of around 33.9% in Tamil Nadu against a national 28.5%. 2. **Body — the mechanism and evidence —** Explain how excess sodium raises blood pressure, cite the rural India trial on potassium-enriched substitutes and the U.K. bread reformulation as proof that population measures work. 3. **Body — the Tamil Nadu design —** Urine-based baseline survey, gradual salt reduction in government kitchens, examination of low-sodium substitutes, label-reading awareness, and treatment linkage through Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam. 4. **Body — gaps and national role —** Processed-food reformulation and front-of-pack labelling through FSSAI, caution on potassium for kidney patients, integration with NP-NCD and the India Hypertension Control Initiative, and the need for re-measurement. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that prevention through changed defaults is cheaper and fairer than lifetime treatment, and that the Tamil Nadu model can be scaled if it measures outcomes honestly.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As District Collector, you are told to reduce salt in the Nutritious Meal Programme, but cooks and parents complain the food tastes bland and children are leaving meals uneaten. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Keep the direction but adjust the pace. Reduce salt in smaller steps so that palates adapt, and train cooks in natural flavour enhancers such as lemon, herbs and spices, which the campaign itself recommends. Monitor plate waste in a sample of schools, because a drop in consumption would defeat the nutrition purpose. Involve parent-teacher committees so the change is explained rather than imposed. **Q2. A packaged-snack manufacturer in your State says the salt campaign is hurting sales and asks the government to stop naming processed foods. How would you respond as Health Secretary?** ***Approach:*** Public health messaging based on evidence cannot be withdrawn because it

affects sales. But I would engage the industry constructively: invite manufacturers to commit to voluntary, time-bound salt reduction, and offer public recognition to those who do. Where a firm reformulates, the campaign can say so. Engagement often achieves more than confrontation, but the message on salt must stay accurate.

Q3. An interview board asks whether a State government should regulate salt content in food. What is your view?

Approach: Food standards are set nationally by FSSAI under the Food Safety and Standards Act, so a State should not create separate product standards that fragment the market. Its strength lies in what it directly controls — public kitchens, health outreach and awareness — and in pressing the national regulator with its own data. I would advise the State to lead by example and by evidence, and to leave product regulation to FSSAI.

6.2 Device Makers Seek Trade-Margin Caps as MRPs Run 10-30 Times Above Cost on Pacemakers and Valves

THE NEWS NEW DELHI. India urgently needs a distinct regulatory framework for pricing medical devices, separate from drugs, Rajiv Nath, forum coordinator of the Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMeD), argued in The Indian Express on 21 September. He wrote after Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe recently flagged exploitative margins in medical devices. The present pharma-centric approach under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, or DPCO, the government order used to fix or cap medicine prices, distorts competition, penalises ethical manufacturers and leaves patients at the mercy of inflated Maximum Retail Prices, he wrote. The Medical Devices Rules, 2017 brought devices under a dedicated regulatory framework for quality and safety, but pricing is still handled largely through mechanisms designed for pharmaceuticals, although the device market spans thousands of products with very different technologies, costs, life cycles and supply chains. Because patients cannot bargain or choose devices and hospitals decide, often guided by profit margins, MRPs are inflated 10-30 times above real costs, according to the article: a pacemaker imported at ₹25,000 is billed to patients at over ₹2 lakh; syringes costing ₹3 at the factory gate are sold for ₹30; heart valves imported at ₹4 lakh have been marked up to ₹26 lakh. Ethical Indian manufacturers on thin margins lose out to importers who exploit loopholes to set artificially high MRPs. The article recalled that in 2017 the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, or NPPA, capped stent prices, cutting costs by 70 to 85% without any supply shortages, and that knee implant prices fell by up to 69%. AiMeD has proposed a trade-margin-based cap at the GST trigger point, the first point of sale where transparency is highest: the landing price for imports and the ex-factory price for Indian makers. A trade margin is the difference between that first price and the price the patient pays. Margins would be capped by price band: 50% for devices above ₹1 lakh such as heart valves, 66% for devices between ₹1,000 and ₹1 lakh such as pacemakers and catheters, and 75% for devices below ₹1,000 such as syringes and IV sets. GST data at the first point of sale would allow easy monitoring, the article said. AiMeD calls for a 12-18 month pilot covering six device categories: pacemakers, heart valves, cardiac catheters, syringes, IV sets and intra-ocular lenses. The article is an industry body's advocacy, not a government proposal. Syllabus link: health financing, regulation and Make in India in medical technology, GS2 and GS3.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Devices regulated as drugs and priced under DPCO → hospitals choose devices on margin, not patient welfare → MRPs 10-30 times cost, importers set high MRPs → stent and knee-implant caps of 2017 show price control can work → industry proposes margin caps at the first point of sale

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Devices are regulated through the drug law —** The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 empowers the Union government to notify devices as drugs. The Medical Devices Rules, 2017, in force from 1 January 2018, classify devices into risk classes A to D and set licensing requirements, with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation as the central regulator. From 1 April 2020 all medical devices were brought under regulation in phases, which placed the entire market within the drug law's framework.
2. **DPCO and the NPPA do the price work —** The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. The National

	Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, set up in 1997 under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, fixes ceiling prices for scheduled formulations in the National List of Essential Medicines and monitors prices of non-scheduled products, whose MRP may ordinarily rise by no more than 10% a year. Paragraph 19 of the DPCO allows the government to fix prices in extraordinary circumstances in the public interest. 3. **Stents and knee implants are the precedents —** Coronary stents were added to the National List of Essential Medicines in 2016, and the NPPA fixed ceiling prices for them in February 2017. Knee implant prices were capped in August 2017 under the extraordinary powers of Paragraph 19. Both are cited as proof that price control in devices can be done without disrupting supply, although industry argued at the time that it discouraged introduction of newer technologies. 4. **Trade margin rationalisation has been tried before —** In 2019 the NPPA capped trade margins on a list of non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines at 30%, which brought down MRPs sharply. In 2021, during the pandemic, it capped trade margins on five devices, including pulse oximeters and glucometers, at 70% at the distributor level. AiMeD's proposal extends this tool to devices more broadly, using price bands.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Health financing and out-of-pocket spending are standard GS2 themes —** India's high out-of-pocket health expenditure has been asked repeatedly. Device mark-ups are a hidden driver of catastrophic spending during surgery, and the stent cap is a known example that can be cited in answers on affordability. 2. **Regulation of pharmaceuticals and devices recurs —** UPSC has asked about the NPPA, the NLEM and price control, and about the need for a separate regulator for medical devices. The National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 and debates on a standalone devices law make this topical.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Medical Devices Rules, 2017, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, came into force on 1 January 2018 and classify devices into risk classes A, B, C and D. • The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. • The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority was set up in 1997 and functions under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers. • Paragraph 19 of the DPCO, 2013 empowers the government to fix prices of any drug in extraordinary circumstances in public interest. • The NPPA fixed ceiling prices of coronary stents in February 2017 after their inclusion in the National List of Essential Medicines. • Under the DPCO, the MRP of a non-scheduled formulation may ordinarily be increased by no more than 10% in a year.
ANALYSIS	1. **The market failure is at the hospital, not the factory —** The article's key insight is that competition exists among manufacturers and wholesalers but not at the point where the patient pays. The hospital chooses the device, and a higher MRP gives a larger margin, so an importer who sets a high MRP can win the hospital's business over a cheaper Indian maker. That is a principal-agent problem: the agent choosing is rewarded for the principal's higher cost. Price control that ignores who chooses will not fix it. 2. **Margin caps at the first point of sale are cleverer than ceiling prices —** Fixing ceiling prices for thousands of devices would need data and technical judgment the NPPA does not have. A margin cap tied to the landed or ex-factory price, verified through

GST invoices, lets the market set the base price while limiting the mark-up. The counter-view is that importers could inflate the declared landing price through related-party transactions, so customs valuation checks would be needed. The idea is workable but not self-enforcing.

3. **The author's interest should be named, and it does not disqualify the argument —** AiMeD represents domestic manufacturers, who gain from a rule that removes importers' advantage in setting high MRPs. That interest is obvious and a candidate should state it. But the patient interest runs in the same direction here, and the stent and knee precedents support the claim that caps did not create shortages. Where industry interest and public interest coincide, the argument can be accepted on its evidence.

4. **A separate device law is the logical end point —** Devices differ from drugs in life cycle, need for training and servicing, and rapid iteration. Regulating them under a drug law made in 1940 was always an interim arrangement. Pricing reform will remain patchwork until devices have their own statute and regulator with pricing, quality and post-market surveillance under one roof. A pilot on six categories is a sensible start, but it should feed into that larger reform.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

Examine why mark-ups on medical devices in India remain far above their cost despite existing price-control mechanisms. Evaluate a trade-margin-based approach to device pricing and its implications for patients and domestic manufacturers.

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction —** Open with the reported examples — a pacemaker imported at ₹25,000 billed at over ₹2 lakh, heart valves marked up from ₹4 lakh to ₹26 lakh — and attribute them to AiMeD's article.
2. **Body — why mark-ups persist —** Explain that devices are priced under a drug-oriented DPCO, that hospitals rather than patients choose devices, that MRPs are set freely by importers, and that the NPPA lacks tools for thousands of products.
3. **Body — the trade-margin approach —** Describe the proposal: cap at the first point of sale using GST data, bands of 50%, 66% and 75%, and a 12-18 month pilot on six categories. Cite the 2017 stent and knee caps and earlier trade margin rationalisation as precedents.
4. **Body — implications —** Benefits to patients and to domestic makers facing import competition; risks of transfer pricing by importers, of reduced availability of newer devices, and of enforcement gaps; need for a separate device law.
5. **Conclusion —** Argue for a pilot with rigorous evaluation as the bridge between the current patchwork and a standalone medical devices regulatory framework.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As a State Drugs Controller, you receive complaints that a private hospital is billing a syringe at ten times its factory price. What can you do under current law?

Approach: Check whether the MRP printed on the product has been exceeded, since selling above MRP is an offence, and whether the MRP itself complies with any NPPA notification on the product. If the hospital sells within MRP, my legal power is limited, so I would report the case to the NPPA with invoices showing the landed and billed prices, which is the kind of evidence it needs for action. I would also publicise the patient's right to a bill with device details, because transparency itself constrains mark-ups.

Q2. As Joint Secretary in the Department of Pharmaceuticals, you are asked to comment on AiMeD's pilot proposal. What would your note say?

Approach: Accept the diagnosis that device pricing needs a distinct approach, and support a pilot because it produces evidence before a nationwide rule. Point out the risks: importers may overstate landing prices, so customs valuation data must be matched with GST data; and hospitals may shift costs into procedure charges. Recommend that the pilot be designed with an independent evaluation of prices, availability and hospital billing, and that consultation include hospitals and patient groups, not only manufacturers.

Q3. An interview board asks whether price caps on devices will discourage innovation and new technology in India. Your view?

Approach: The concern is real, and after the stent cap some companies did hesitate to launch newer versions. But a margin cap based on actual cost allows a more expensive new device to carry a higher price, so it does not penalise innovation the way a single ceiling does. The better safeguard is a clear process for pricing new devices on their evidence. Affordability and innovation are compatible if the rule targets excess margins rather than the cost of technology.

6.3 LASI Data Put Dementia at 8.8 Million Older Indians as Geriatricians Push Early, Home-Based Care

THE NEWS NEW DELHI. India is looking at an "old age pandemic" of cognitive decline, geriatrician Dr Prasun Chatterjee told The Indian Express in a health feature by Rinku Ghosh on 21 September, which argued that dementia care must begin with early detection and continue at home. Dr Chatterjee is a WHO Technical Advisory Group member for Healthy Ageing, president of the Indian Academy of Geriatrics and group clinical lead for geriatric medicine and longevity science at Apollo Hospital, Delhi. He explained that Alzheimer's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder in which abnormal protein clumps called amyloid plaques and tau tangles build up in the brain and destroy memory, thinking and the ability to carry out daily tasks. It is the most common cause of dementia, but the two terms are not interchangeable: dementia is a decline in memory, thinking, behaviour or other cognitive abilities severe enough to interfere with everyday life, while Alzheimer's is one specific disease that causes it. The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, a nationally representative survey, estimated that about 7.4% of Indians aged 60 and above — roughly 8.8 million people — were living with dementia, based on data collected in 2017-2020. The more detailed LASI-DAD research estimated the prevalence of major neurocognitive disorder at 7.2% and mild neurocognitive disorder at 17.6%; among those aged 80 and above, major neurocognitive disorder was 15.2%. Mild cognitive impairment is a stage in which cognitive abilities have begun to decline but substantial independence is still preserved, and Dr Chatterjee said diagnosing it opens a window for intervention. One 78-year-old patient's cognitive test score rose from 67/100 to 87/100 after three months of cognitive training and family-led activities at home. His MISCI pilot trial at AIIMS, New Delhi, with 60 older adults with subjective cognitive impairment, found improvements in attention, concentration, recall and retention after six months, greatest in the group combining cognitive training with a Mediterranean-equivalent diet and exercise. Modifiable risk factors he listed include hypertension, diabetes, obesity, physical inactivity, lack of sleep, smoking, harmful alcohol use, hearing loss, depression and social isolation; he advised a cognitive assessment at 65 instead of 75. On new drugs, the feature noted that anti-amyloid therapies raise questions of equitable access: donanemab, introduced by Eli Lilly as Lormaizi, costs ₹91,688 per 350 mg vial in India. "India needs a system that begins before the patient reaches the neurologist," Dr Chatterjee said. Syllabus link: health of the elderly, vulnerable sections and social sector services, GS1 and GS2.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rising life expectancy enlarges the over-60 and over-80 population → LASI finds 7.4% of over-60s living with dementia → memory loss dismissed as normal ageing delays diagnosis → specialist care scarce and new drugs costly → early screening and family-based care proposed as India's realistic route

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **LASI is India's official ageing survey** — The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India is conducted by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, with Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the University of Southern California. Wave 1 covered over 72,000 adults aged 45 and above and their spouses across all States and Union Territories, and

	was released in 2021. LASI-DAD, the Harmonized Diagnostic Assessment of Dementia, is a sub-study that gives clinically detailed dementia estimates. 2. **The legal framework for older persons is split across laws —** The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 obliges children and relatives to maintain senior citizens and provides for tribunals and old-age homes. Article 41 directs the State to make effective provision for public assistance in old age, within its economic capacity. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 allows a person to make an advance directive and appoint a nominated representative, which is directly relevant to people who may later lose decision-making capacity. 3. **National programmes exist but dementia is a small part —** The National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly, launched in 2010, provides geriatric services at district hospitals and above, and regional geriatric centres in medical colleges. The WHO's Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia 2017-2025 urged countries to adopt national dementia plans; India does not yet have a standalone national dementia policy. World Alzheimer's Day is observed on 21 September each year. 4. **The new drugs target amyloid, with limits —** Anti-amyloid monoclonal antibodies such as lecanemab and donanemab clear amyloid plaques and have been shown in trials to modestly slow decline in early Alzheimer's disease. They require confirmation of amyloid through scans or tests, regular infusions and MRI monitoring for brain swelling or bleeding. Their cost and infrastructure needs make them inaccessible to most patients in low- and middle-income countries.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Population ageing is a GS1 and GS2 theme —** The syllabus includes population and associated issues and welfare schemes for vulnerable sections. UPSC has asked about India's demographic transition, the challenges of an ageing population and the adequacy of social security for the elderly. Dementia adds the dimension of long-term care, which is usually missing from answers. 2. **The care economy is rising in importance —** Questions on unpaid care work, mostly by women, and on the need for a care economy have appeared in GS1 and essays. Dementia care falling on families, as the feature notes, links health to gender and labour.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Longitudinal Ageing Study in India is conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai. • Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and is associated with amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brain. • The National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly was launched in 2010. • The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 provides for maintenance tribunals for senior citizens. • The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 provides for advance directives and nominated representatives. • World Alzheimer's Day is observed on 21 September. • Article 41 of the Constitution directs the State to provide public assistance in cases of old age, within the limits of its economic capacity.
ANALYSIS	1. **The numbers point to a care problem, not only a medical one —** 8.8 million people with dementia, and a much larger group with mild impairment, cannot be managed by specialists; India has few geriatricians and neurologists relative to that scale. The feature's emphasis on family-led cognitive activity is therefore not a soft alternative to

	medicine but the only model that can reach most patients. Policy should treat caregivers as part of the health system, with training, respite and support, rather than as a private matter. 2. **Families carry the burden, and that burden is gendered —** Dr Chatterjee notes that families provide most dementia care in India. In practice this falls largely on women — daughters, daughters-in-law and wives — often at the cost of paid work. The counter-view is that family care preserves dignity and familiarity, which the feature shows can help the patient. Both are true; the policy task is to support family care without assuming it is free. 3. **Expensive new drugs will widen inequality unless policy is careful —** At ₹91,688 per vial, anti-amyloid therapy is out of reach for almost everyone, and it also needs scans and monitoring available only in large cities. If it becomes the public image of dementia treatment, it could crowd out attention to cheap measures with broader benefit — controlling blood pressure, treating hearing loss, early screening. Public spending should favour the latter, while insurance and price negotiation address access to the former over time. 4. **Prevention runs through the NCD programme India already has —** Many risk factors listed — hypertension, diabetes, inactivity, smoking, alcohol — are exactly those targeted by the NCD programme. Adding a brief cognitive screen at 65 to the existing NCD screening at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs would be a low-cost way to catch mild impairment. The evidence from the MISCI pilot is small, 60 people, so claims should be modest, but early detection costs little and helps families plan.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India is ageing before it has built a system of long-term care." Discuss the challenges posed by the rising burden of dementia in India and suggest a framework for early detection and care.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Cite LASI's estimate of about 7.4% of those aged 60 and above, roughly 8.8 million people, living with dementia, and LASI-DAD's 15.2% prevalence of major neurocognitive disorder among those above 80. 2. **Body — the challenges —** Late diagnosis because memory loss is dismissed as ageing, shortage of geriatric specialists, family and gendered care burden, costly anti-amyloid drugs requiring scans and monitoring, and absence of a national dementia plan. 3. **Body — early detection —** Cognitive screening at 65 within NCD screening, training of community health workers to recognise warning signs, and linkage to district geriatric services under the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly. 4. **Body — care and prevention —** Control of modifiable risk factors through the NCD programme, caregiver training and respite, day-care centres, use of the Mental Healthcare Act's advance directive, and support under the Senior Citizens Act. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that the realistic Indian model combines prevention, early detection and supported family care, with expensive drugs a later and targeted addition rather than the centre of policy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As District Health Officer, how would you begin a dementia screening effort without new staff or budget?** ***Approach:*** Build it into existing NCD screening at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs: train community health officers and ASHAs to ask a few standard questions on memory and daily functioning during visits to people over 60. Refer positive screens to the district hospital's geriatric clinic under the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly. Track the numbers, because data will make the case for dedicated resources later. Start small in a few blocks and expand once the process works.

Q2. A daughter tells a maintenance tribunal that she has left her job to care for her father with dementia and her brothers contribute nothing. As the presiding officer, what do you do?

Approach: The Senior Citizens Act makes maintenance an obligation of children and relatives, so I can direct the other children to contribute to the father's maintenance according to their means. I would also connect the family with the district's geriatric and social welfare services for respite care and counselling. The order should recognise that care itself is a contribution, so that the burden is shared fairly.

Q3. An interview board asks whether the government should subsidise new Alzheimer's drugs. What is your answer?

Approach: Not as a first priority. The drugs are costly, their benefit is modest and limited to early-stage patients, and they need scans and monitoring that most districts lack. Public money would help more people if spent on risk-factor control, early screening and caregiver support. Price negotiation and inclusion in insurance for eligible patients can follow as evidence and infrastructure improve.

7. Science & Technology

All three stories today are about the same question asked in three industries: who controls the input that everything else depends on. For nuclear power the input is fissile fuel, and India's most senior nuclear scientist is now saying openly that waiting for fast breeders to unlock thorium is too slow. For electronics the input is the memory chip, and China has just shown that export controls delay a determined state but do not stop it. For payments the input is the customer's act of authorisation, and agentic AI proposes to hand part of it to software. In each case the technology is less interesting than the dependency it creates or removes.

7.1 Kakodkar Urges Thorium-HALEU Fuel in PHWRs as NPCIL Begins Fuel Loading at RAPP-8

THE NEWS New Delhi and Rawatbhata, Rajasthan. Two developments reported by The Indian Express on 21 September sit side by side. First, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) began initial fuel loading at Unit 8 of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Project (RAPP) at Rawatbhata at 15:18 hours on 19 September 2026, after permission from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) following, in NPCIL's words, "rigorous safety evaluations, major system integrity audits and site readiness reviews". RAPP-8 is a 700 MWe indigenous pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR) — a reactor that burns natural uranium and uses heavy water to slow neutrons — and the fourth of a series of 16 such units. Kakrapar Units 3 and 4 in Gujarat began commercial operation in 2023-24 and RAPP-7 in April 2025. The next step is the First Approach to Criticality, when a controlled chain reaction starts; fuel loading to commercial operation typically takes six to eight months, and NPCIL expects it this financial year. NPCIL has eight other reactors under construction — two each at Gorakhpur in Haryana and Kaiga in Karnataka, and four at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu. Second, in an interview, Anil Kakodkar, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and now Chancellor of the Homi Bhabha National Institute, argued for introducing thorium into the PHWR fleet early, in parallel with Homi Bhabha's three-stage programme conceived in the 1950s. His reasoning: global uranium resources can sustain only about 550-750 GWe in once-through mode over a 60-year reactor life, against about 1,400 GWe of capacity projected by the World Nuclear Association for 2050, so a uranium supply squeeze could hit India in 10-15 years. Fast breeder reactors are, in his estimate, two to three decades from fleet-mode deployment. Using HALEU-thorium fuel — thorium blended with high-assay low-enriched uranium — in PHWRs "without any significant design change" would, he said, open an earlier path to thorium irradiation at scale, cut spent-fuel inventory and save uranium, and could allow the third stage with thorium molten salt reactors to begin in about 15 years. He expects domestic PHWRs to take a major share of the 100 GWe nuclear mission up to 2047, with imported light water reactors making up most of the rest. Asked about the sector's opening after the SHANTI Act, he stressed that fuel recycling must remain with the government.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India has large thorium but little uranium → Bhabha's three-stage plan routes thorium through fast breeders → fast breeders slip by decades while uranium demand rises worldwide → PHWR fleet expands in 700 MWe units → Kakodkar proposes feeding thorium into PHWRs now rather than waiting for stage two

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **The three-stage programme exists because India's geology is lopsided —** India has modest uranium reserves and one of the world's largest thorium resources, found mainly in the monazite sands of the Kerala, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh coasts. Thorium-232 is fertile, not fissile: it cannot sustain a chain reaction by itself and must first absorb a neutron to become uranium-233. Bhabha's plan therefore has three stages — PHWRs burning natural uranium and producing plutonium, fast breeder reactors burning that plutonium and breeding more fuel, and finally reactors running on the thorium-uranium-233 cycle. The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor at Kalpakkam, built by BHAVINI, is the flagship of the second stage. 2. **A PHWR is India's own reactor, not an imported design —** A pressurised heavy water reactor uses natural uranium as fuel and heavy water (deuterium oxide) as both moderator and coolant, which is why it needs no enrichment plant. India began with the Canadian CANDU design at Rawatbhata and developed indigenous 220 MWe, 540 MWe and now 700 MWe versions. In 2017 the Union Cabinet approved ten 700 MWe PHWRs to be built in fleet mode — standardised design, bulk procurement and parallel

	construction — to cut cost and time. Light water reactors, by contrast, need enriched uranium and are the type India builds with foreign partners, as at Kudankulam with Russia. 3. **HALEU sits between reactor fuel and weapons material —** Ordinary power-reactor fuel is enriched to under 5% uranium-235, while high-assay low-enriched uranium is enriched to between 5% and 20%. Above 20% uranium is classed as highly enriched. HALEU's higher fissile content lets it act as the 'driver' that supplies neutrons to thorium in a mixed fuel, which is the role plutonium plays in the original three-stage design. Because enrichment capacity is concentrated in a few countries, HALEU availability is itself a supply-security question. 4. **AERB is the regulator, NPCIL the operator — and the separation is statutory —** The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board was constituted in 1983 under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 to carry out regulatory and safety functions, and its consent is required at each stage — siting, construction, commissioning, fuel loading and criticality. NPCIL, a public sector enterprise under the Department of Atomic Energy set up in 1987, designs, builds and operates the reactors. The Department of Atomic Energy reports directly to the Prime Minister, and the Atomic Energy Commission, set up in 1948, frames policy.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Nuclear energy is asked as energy security, not as physics —** The GS3 syllabus lists 'infrastructure: energy' and 'indigenisation of technology and developing new technology'. UPSC Mains has asked about the relevance of nuclear energy in India's energy mix given its costs and fuel constraints, and the three-stage programme with thorium is the standard spine of such answers. Kakodkar's proposal gives a current, named expert argument that modifies that spine. 2. **Prelims tests the stages, the moderator and the regulator —** Prelims questions on nuclear power have turned on which element is fertile and which fissile, what moderator a reactor uses, which reactor belongs to which stage, and which body regulates safety. The 2026 news adds HALEU and molten salt reactors as terms the examiner can now reasonably use in a statement. 3. **The 100 GWe target makes every capacity addition examinable —** Once a numerical national target is set, the examiner asks whether it is achievable. RAPP-8, the 16-unit PHWR series and the eight reactors under construction are the building blocks against which the target can be judged, and a candidate who can name them writes a better answer than one who repeats the target.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Thorium-232 is a fertile material that is converted into fissile uranium-233 on absorbing a neutron; uranium-235 is the only naturally occurring fissile isotope. • A pressurised heavy water reactor uses natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as moderator and coolant, and forms the first stage of India's three-stage nuclear power programme. • The three-stage programme was conceived by Homi J. Bhabha in the 1950s; its second stage is based on fast breeder reactors and its third on the thorium-uranium-233 cycle. • High-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU) is uranium enriched to between 5% and 20% uranium-235. • The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board was constituted in 1983 under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and must authorise initial fuel loading and first criticality of a power reactor. • The Rajasthan Atomic Power Project is at Rawatbhata; the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station is in Gujarat; the Kaiga Generating Station is in Karnataka; and the

	Kudankulam project is in Tamil Nadu. ● First Approach to Criticality is the stage at which a reactor first sustains a controlled fission chain reaction.
ANALYSIS	1. **Kakodkar is conceding, politely, that stage two has become the bottleneck —** The original design assumed that fast breeders would multiply plutonium fast enough to seed a large thorium stage. His estimate that fleet-mode fast reactors are two to three decades away, and that they must first pass through oxide-fuelled, metallic-fuelled and new fuel-cycle transitions, amounts to saying the second stage cannot carry the timetable alone. Proposing a HALEU-thorium route in existing PHWRs is a way of running the third stage's fuel physics without waiting for the second stage's hardware. It is not an abandonment of Bhabha's plan, but it is a significant change in its sequencing, and it comes from its most senior custodian. 2. **The proposal swaps one dependency for another —** Thorium in a PHWR needs a fissile driver, and in this scheme the driver is HALEU. India's enrichment capacity is limited and the global supply of HALEU is concentrated. So the route reduces dependence on natural uranium imports while creating a need for enriched uranium, either produced at home at scale or bought abroad. Whether it improves self-reliance depends entirely on which of the two India can secure more reliably, and the interview does not settle that. An honest answer presents it as a trade-off, not a free gain. 3. **Fleet mode is the real achievement and it is still slow —** RAPP-8 is only the fourth of 16 700 MWe units, several years after the first two at Kakrapar reached commercial operation in 2023-24. Standardisation clearly works — each unit is described as strengthening the design — but the pace of one unit every year or two will not add up to the major share of 100 GWe by 2047 that Kakodkar expects. The bottlenecks are site acquisition, heavy components and construction management rather than reactor physics, which is why the opening of the sector matters: it is a bet that capital and project capacity, not technology, are the binding constraints. 4. **Keeping recycling with the government is a non-negotiable, and it shapes the market —** Kakodkar's insistence that fuel recycling must remain within government reflects both non-proliferation obligations and the logic of the three-stage plan, where reprocessed fuel is the bridge between stages. The consequence is that any private or foreign participant will operate reactors inside a fuel cycle it does not control. That is a sound safeguard, but it means investors carry fuel-supply risk they cannot manage themselves, and the government's reliability as fuel supplier becomes part of the investment case. 5. **The counter-view: the uranium squeeze may be overstated —** Projections of a uranium shortfall have been made before and have repeatedly been softened by new discoveries, higher prices bringing marginal mines into production, and slower-than-projected reactor building worldwide. If the World Nuclear Association's 1,400 GWe figure is not reached, the pressure Kakodkar describes eases. The stronger version of his argument therefore does not rest on scarcity alone but on the spent-fuel and safety advantages he also lists, which hold whether or not uranium becomes scarce.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's three-stage nuclear programme was designed around the country's thorium reserves, but its timetable has been set by the slow progress of fast breeder reactors." In the light of recent proposals to introduce thorium-based fuel in pressurised heavy water reactors, critically examine the options before India for achieving long-term nuclear fuel security.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State India's resource asymmetry in one sentence — limited uranium, large thorium — and outline the three stages with the reactor type and fuel for each. Mention the 100 GWe target by 2047 as the context that makes timing matter.

	2. Body — why the sequence is under strain — Use Kakodkar's figures: global uranium sustaining about 550-750 GWe in once-through mode against a projected 1,400 GWe by 2050, and fast reactors two to three decades from fleet deployment. Explain why stage two is the bottleneck. **3. Body — the options —** Set out three routes: accelerate fast breeders, introduce HALEU-thorium fuel in the expanding PHWR fleet, and develop molten salt reactors for the third stage. For each give one advantage and one constraint, especially HALEU's dependence on enrichment capacity. **4. Body — the institutional side —** Cite the 700 MWe fleet-mode series with RAPP-8 as its fourth unit, AERB's role at each stage, the opening of the sector under the SHANTI Act, and the principle that recycling remains with government. **5. Conclusion —** Argue for a parallel-path strategy: keep the three-stage plan as the long-term architecture but hedge its timetable with a thorium route in existing reactors, while securing enrichment and building project-execution capacity.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the District Collector of the district hosting a new nuclear unit. Villagers ask whether fuel loading means the plant is now 'dangerous'. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** Answer with facts, not reassurance. Explain that fuel loading is a stage authorised by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board after safety reviews, that the reactor does not produce power until it reaches criticality later, and that there are defined emergency-preparedness zones around every plant. Hold a public meeting with the station director and the district's disaster management officials present, and publish the off-site emergency plan in the local language. People accept a risk they understand far more readily than one they sense is being hidden. **Q2. As an officer in the Department of Atomic Energy, you are asked to assess a proposal to test HALEU-thorium fuel in an operating PHWR. What questions must your note answer?** ***Approach:*** It must answer where the HALEU comes from and whether that supply is secure, what regulatory approvals and safety analyses the AERB will require for a new fuel in an existing design, and how the spent fuel will be handled within the government-controlled fuel cycle. It must also estimate the uranium saving and spent-fuel reduction against the cost of the test programme. Finally, it should propose a limited demonstration in one unit, with clear success criteria, before any fleet-wide decision. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India open its nuclear sector to private operators if the fuel cycle stays with the government?** ***Approach:*** Yes, with conditions. Private capital and project-management capacity can speed construction, which is the real bottleneck, while keeping enrichment, reprocessing and spent-fuel management with the state protects safety and non-proliferation. The conditions are a strong and visibly independent regulator, clear liability rules, and a reliable fuel-supply contract so that investors are not hostage to administrative delay. Without those, private entry would add risk without adding speed.

7.2 China's CXMT Begins Mass Production of Fifth-Generation DRAM Despite US Export Controls

THE NEWS Beijing and Hefei, China. Reuters reported, and The Indian Express carried on 21 September, that CXMT, China's leading maker of DRAM chips, said on 20 September that its fifth-generation technology platform had entered mass production. DRAM, or dynamic random-access memory, is the short-term working memory that phones, computers and other devices use to run apps and programmes. The Hefei-based company, which listed on Shanghai's STAR Market this year, said the new platform packs the tiny data-storing structures closer together, so more memory fits on each chip and more chips can be cut from each silicon wafer. It said it had reduced the spacing of key features in the memory-cell area to 11.95 nanometres, about 12 billionths of a metre, using "quadruple patterning" — a process that repeats several manufacturing steps to print finer circuit lines than the equipment could print in one pass. CXMT said the platform yields at least 50% more gross chip dies per wafer than its fourth-generation platform, on an 8-gigabit-chip baseline; the paper notes that gross dies measure potential chips before defective ones are excluded, not the proportion that passes final testing. The company also unveiled two 24-gigabit LPDDR5X chips — a power-saving type of DRAM used mainly in smartphones and portable devices — which each hold 50% more data than its previous equivalent products and are already in mass production. "Our process capability is now on par with the most advanced mass-produced nodes out there in the industry," said Luo Xiaodong, CXMT's vice president and head of its marketing centre, at the 2026 World Manufacturing Convention in Hefei. CXMT said it developed the platform using computer simulations and joint work with Chinese chip-equipment makers on critical steps. The advance comes as Beijing seeks to reduce reliance on foreign semiconductor technology and as US export controls since 2022 have restricted China's access to certain advanced chipmaking equipment and related software. The claimed result would make CXMT a stronger competitor to Samsung Electronics, SK Hynix and Micron Technology, the three firms that dominate the global memory market. For India, the story lands in the same edition as The Hindu's analysis of an 'assembly trap' in which electronics import intensity from China has risen despite the self-reliance push.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Memory chips dominated by three non-Chinese firms → US export controls from 2022 cut China's access to advanced tools → China backs domestic champions and domestic toolmakers → CXMT uses quadruple patterning to reach 11.95 nm cell spacing → China gains a third source of memory supply while India still imports its chips

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Memory and logic are different industries, and India has entered only the back end of one —** Logic chips process data and memory chips store it. DRAM is volatile memory that loses data when power is cut, while NAND flash is non-volatile storage used in phones and solid-state drives. Memory is a commodity business dominated by a few very large firms, with prices that swing sharply with the demand cycle. India's first major memory investment, Micron's plant at Sanand in Gujarat approved in 2023, is an assembly, testing, marking and packaging unit, not a wafer fabrication plant. 2. **Multiple patterning is how you go smaller without the newest machines —** Lithography prints circuit patterns on a wafer using light, and the finest patterns today need extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography machines, which China cannot import. Multiple patterning splits one fine pattern into several coarser exposures printed in sequence on older deep ultraviolet machines. It works, but each extra step adds cost, time and chances for defects, which is why yield is the real test of CXMT's claim. 3. **Export controls are a tool of technology denial with a long lineage —** The United States tightened controls on advanced semiconductors and chipmaking equipment to China from October 2022, and has since extended them. Such controls work through national law but gain force when allies with key technologies — the Netherlands and Japan in lithography and equipment — align with them. India itself has been on both sides of technology denial, having faced nuclear and dual-use export restrictions before joining the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018. 4. **India Semiconductor Mission is the policy vehicle —** The India Semiconductor Mission, set up in 2021 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology within the Semicon India programme, gives fiscal support to fabrication units, display fabs, compound semiconductor facilities and assembly and testing units, and runs the Design Linked Incentive scheme for chip design firms. Its logic is that a country without a domestic chip supply is exposed to exactly the kind of supply disruption and denial that CXMT's story illustrates.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Semiconductors appear in GS3 under indigenisation and in GS2 under international relations —** The syllabus asks about ‘indigenisation of technology’ and ‘effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests’. Chip supply chains fit both, and Mains questions on India’s semiconductor ambitions have asked candidates to weigh incentives against structural gaps. 2. **Prelims likes the vocabulary of the industry —** Terms such as fab, ATMP or OSAT, lithography, node, DRAM and NAND are the kind of technical vocabulary Prelims turns into definition statements. Knowing that DRAM is volatile working memory, and that assembly and packaging is not fabrication, protects against the commonest traps. 3. **China’s response to sanctions is itself a recurring theme —** The examiner has shown interest in whether sanctions achieve their purpose. CXMT is a concrete case where a sanctioned state appears to have reached near-frontier output by working around a restriction rather than breaching it.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) is volatile memory used as a device’s short-term working memory, whereas NAND flash is non-volatile storage that retains data without power. ● LPDDR5X is a low-power DRAM standard used mainly in smartphones and portable electronics. ● Multiple patterning, such as double or quadruple patterning, uses repeated exposures to print features finer than a lithography tool’s single-pass resolution. ● The India Semiconductor Mission was set up in 2021 under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as part of the Semicon India programme. ● Micron’s semiconductor facility at Sanand, Gujarat is an assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP) unit, not a wafer fabrication plant. ● India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement in 2017 and the Australia Group in 2018; it is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
ANALYSIS	1. **Export controls bought time, not a permanent lead —** The controls were designed to keep China a generation or more behind at the frontier. CXMT’s claim is that it has reached parity with the most advanced mass-produced memory nodes using older equipment and domestic toolmakers. If the yield is commercially viable, the controls achieved delay and higher cost for China, not exclusion. The broader lesson is that denial works best against a country without industrial depth and least well against one with a large market, state capital and a supplier base willing to learn. 2. **The claim deserves scepticism about yield —** The 50% gain is in gross dies per wafer, and the article itself notes that this counts chips before defective ones are removed. Quadruple patterning multiplies process steps and therefore the opportunities for defects. A company can be technically capable of a node and still commercially uncompetitive at it if too many chips fail testing. Until independent teardowns or market share confirm it, the correct reading is ‘credible capability, unproven economics’. 3. **For India the risk is a new layer of dependence —** A cheaper third source of memory will be attractive to Indian phone assemblers who already import most components. The Hindu’s ‘assembly trap’ analysis in the same edition notes rising import intensity from China in electronics. If Chinese memory becomes the cheapest option, India’s assembly boom will deepen reliance on China for yet another critical input, which is the opposite of what the Production Linked Incentive and semiconductor schemes intend.

	4. **It may also be an opening for Indian bargaining —** The counter-view is that more competition in memory lowers prices for Indian manufacturers and weakens the pricing power of the three incumbents. A diversified supply, including Micron's Sanand packaging and possible future partners, gives India more options in negotiating investment. The policy task is not to exclude Chinese memory but to make sure it is one supplier among several, especially for defence and critical infrastructure. 5. **Toolmakers, not chipmakers, are the real story —** CXMT credits joint work with Chinese equipment makers. That is the deeper shift: a country that can make the machines that make chips is far harder to sanction than one that only operates imported machines. India's semiconductor effort has focused on attracting fabs and packaging units; it has done much less on equipment, materials and chemicals, where long-term leverage lies.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Technology-denial regimes can delay but rarely prevent a determined state from acquiring strategic capabilities. Discuss with reference to recent developments in China's semiconductor industry, and examine the lessons for India's semiconductor strategy.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define technology denial and note that the US has restricted advanced chipmaking equipment exports to China since 2022. State that CXMT has announced mass production of a fifth-generation DRAM platform. 2. **Body — how China worked around the controls —** Explain quadruple patterning on older lithography, the 11.95 nm cell spacing, and the use of domestic equipment makers. Qualify the claim by noting that gross dies are not yield. 3. **Body — India's own history with denial —** Recall that India developed nuclear and space capability under technology restrictions before joining the MTCR, Wassenaar and Australia Group, which shows both the costs and the eventual limits of denial. 4. **Body — lessons for India —** Cover the India Semiconductor Mission, the difference between packaging and fabrication, the risk of the 'assembly trap', and the neglected areas of equipment, materials and design talent. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that resilience comes from depth across the supply chain rather than from any single fab, and that India should diversify suppliers while building capability in the least visible but most strategic segments.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in MeitY. A domestic phone assembler seeks incentive support while sourcing most of its memory from China. How do you assess the application?** ***Approach:*** Assess it by the scheme's rules first, since incentives are given against defined criteria and not discretion. But record the domestic value addition and the concentration of imported inputs, because those numbers show whether the scheme is building capability or only assembly. Recommend that future scheme revisions link part of the incentive to localisation or diversification of critical components, with a reasonable glide path so firms can adjust. **Q2. The armed forces ask whether commercial memory chips from any single country should be barred from defence electronics. What is your advice?** ***Approach:*** A blanket ban by country is simple but can be expensive and hard to enforce, because origin is often hidden deep in the supply chain. A better approach is a trusted-source list for critical systems, testing and certification of components, and a bill of materials declaration by suppliers. For the most sensitive systems, restrict sourcing to vetted suppliers and fund domestic or allied alternatives. **Q3. An interview board asks whether India should seek to build its own DRAM fab.**

Approach: Not immediately. Memory fabs are capital-intensive, cyclical and dominated by giants, so a first Indian fab would struggle to compete on cost. It is wiser to strengthen packaging, design and equipment capability, attract a partner for a specialised or mature-node fab, and build the talent base. A memory fab can follow once the ecosystem and demand are deep enough to sustain it through downturns.

7.3 NPCI's AI-Powered MyUPI and AtOM Push Indian Payments Toward Agentic Commerce

THE NEWS Mumbai. The Indian Express reported on 21 September that the payments industry is moving from conventional artificial intelligence toward 'agentic AI', and that the Global Fintech Fest (GFF), held in Mumbai from 8 to 11 September, saw leading payments companies showcase such products. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) unveiled MyUPI, an AI-powered revamp able to delegate pre-authorised payments and to file payment disputes automatically. It also launched a back-end tool called Agentic Orchestration and Messaging (AtOM), described as a "connective tissue" for AI interaction across the financial ecosystem. The report explains the terms. Conventional AI has long been used in payments to reduce friction and to screen customers from fraudulent transactions. Agentic AI is a model that executes tasks for users without constant prompts, but within set limits. Agentic commerce is a digital trade model in which AI agents discover, negotiate and execute purchases on a customer's behalf; it does not bypass authorisation but cuts the number of steps, for instance by picking the best card or payment mode and reducing multiple OTPs to a one-time authentication, while the consumer keeps oversight and can change any component. The report cites Amazon Pay's Smart Wallet, demonstrated at GFF, which uses smart recommendations, biometric authentication and tap-and-pay, and can auto-execute small-ticket regular purchases within a limit: a customer with a monthly limit of ₹10,000 ordering groceries would not need to authenticate each time until that month's spending crossed the threshold. "With agentic AI, I think that assistance for humans to get their job done in a very informed, intelligent manner, with a lot of control and trust, is kind of a large opportunity we see," said Girish Krishnan, Director of payments, rewards and merchant services at Amazon Pay India. The paper notes that MyUPI has a similar feature, and that wallets from Samsung Pay, Google Pay and PhonePe offer PIN-less small-ticket purchases, though not all of this is AI. It adds that adoption is at a nascent stage, that agentic commerce is currently the biggest use-case, and that agentic AI could eventually streamline the whole 'procurement to payment' process for businesses.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

UPI makes payments instant and cheap → fraud and friction become the main problems → AI is used first to screen fraud → pre-authorised limits and PIN-less small payments reduce friction → agentic AI proposes that software, not the customer, initiates payments within a mandate

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **NPCI is a not-for-profit owned by banks, regulated by the RBI —** The National Payments Corporation of India was set up in 2008 as an umbrella organisation for retail payments, promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association, and is registered as a not-for-profit company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013. It operates UPI, launched in 2016, along with RuPay, IMPS, the National Automated Clearing House and FASTag infrastructure. It operates under authorisation from the RBI.

2. **The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 is the legal base —** This Act makes the RBI the authority to regulate and supervise payment systems in India, and no payment system can operate without RBI authorisation. The RBI acts through its Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems. Rules on authentication, mandates for recurring payments and customer liability for unauthorised transactions all flow from this regulatory power.

3. **Authentication is the RBI's central safeguard, and agents test it —** The RBI requires an additional factor of authentication, such as an OTP or PIN, for most digital payments, and allows recurring e-mandates with only the first transaction authenticated, within limits it sets. UPI Lite permits small-value payments without a PIN from an on-device

	wallet. Agentic commerce works inside these rules by stretching the pre-authorised mandate, which is why the precise limits and the customer's ability to revoke them matter. 4. **Data protection now travels with the payment —** The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 requires that personal data be processed only for a lawful purpose with consent, and gives individuals rights to information, correction and erasure. An AI agent that reads shopping history to recommend purchases and then pays for them is processing personal data at every step, so consent, purpose limitation and accountability of the 'data fiduciary' are directly engaged.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Digital public infrastructure is a favourite GS3 topic —** Questions on UPI, digital payments and financial inclusion appear under 'inclusive growth' and 'awareness in IT'. Agentic payments are the next stage of that story, and the examiner tends to reward candidates who can pair a technological advance with its risks. 2. **AI governance is emerging in both GS3 and the Essay paper —** UPSC has begun asking about the social and ethical effects of artificial intelligence. Payments are a practical domain in which issues of consent, accountability and liability for automated decisions are concrete rather than abstract. 3. **Prelims asks about the institutions —** Who owns NPCI, under which Act the RBI regulates payment systems, and what UPI Lite or e-mandates are, are all standard Prelims material. Today's news adds MyUPI and AtOM as names to recognise.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The National Payments Corporation of India was incorporated in 2008 as a not-for-profit company promoted by the Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Banks' Association. • The Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 designates the Reserve Bank of India as the authority to regulate and supervise payment systems. • The Unified Payments Interface was launched by NPCI in 2016. • UPI Lite is an on-device wallet that allows small-value UPI payments without entering a UPI PIN. • The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 governs the processing of digital personal data and establishes the Data Protection Board of India. • Agentic AI refers to AI systems that execute multi-step tasks on a user's behalf within defined limits, without needing a prompt at each step.
ANALYSIS	1. **The real change is who initiates a payment —** Every earlier convenience in digital payments still left the customer to press 'pay'. Agentic commerce moves the initiating act to software acting under a standing mandate. That is a shift in legal and practical responsibility, not merely a smoother interface. The existing framework was built around a human authorising each transaction, and it will need clear answers to who is liable when the agent buys the wrong thing or the right thing at the wrong price. 2. **Limits are the safeguard, so they must be easy to see and revoke —** The ₹10,000 monthly grocery limit in the Smart Wallet example shows the design principle: autonomy inside a cap. That works only if the customer knows the cap exists, can see what has been spent against it, and can cancel it instantly. For less digitally literate users, who are the fastest-growing UPI population, a standing mandate they have forgotten is a vulnerability. Regulation should therefore focus on visible limits and simple revocation rather than on banning agents. 3. **Automated dispute filing may be the most valuable feature —** Disputes are where ordinary customers lose the most, because the process is slow and tiring. If MyUPI can

	file disputes automatically, it shifts effort from the weak party to the system. That is a genuine consumer-protection gain, and it deserves more attention than the shopping features. The risk is a flood of automated claims, which the dispute machinery must be ready to handle. 4. **Recommendation and payment in one agent creates a conflict of interest —** An agent that both suggests what to buy and chooses how to pay may favour the platform's own products, partner merchants or the card that earns the platform the most. The report's example of an agent picking the 'ideal card' begs the question: ideal for whom? Disclosure of how recommendations are made, and a duty to act in the customer's interest, are the obvious safeguards, and competition regulators will have a stake as well as the RBI. 5. **The counter-view: this is incremental, not revolutionary —** The article itself notes that PIN-less small-ticket payments already exist in many wallets and are not AI. Much of what is called agentic today is automation with a new label. That is a fair corrective. The regulatory response should be proportionate — built on existing mandate and authentication rules — and should tighten only where real autonomy, such as negotiation and purchase selection, is introduced.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Agentic artificial intelligence could make digital payments frictionless but also shifts the act of authorisation from the customer to software. Examine the opportunities and risks of agentic commerce for India's payments ecosystem and suggest a regulatory approach.
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define agentic AI and agentic commerce in a sentence each, and mention NPCI's MyUPI and AtOM unveiled at the Global Fintech Fest in September 2026. 2. **Body — opportunities —** Cover fewer steps and OTPs, better deals, automated dispute filing, and streamlining business procurement-to-payment. Link these to UPI's scale and inclusion goals. 3. **Body — risks —** Discuss liability for wrong purchases, forgotten standing mandates, fraud through compromised agents, data-protection concerns under the DPDP Act, 2023, and conflicts of interest when one agent recommends and pays. 4. **Body — regulatory approach —** Propose using the Payment and Settlement Systems Act and RBI authentication rules: capped mandates, clear display and easy revocation, audit trails for agent actions, disclosure of recommendation logic, and clear allocation of liability. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue for a proportionate, principle-based approach that preserves innovation while keeping the customer in control, noting that trust has been UPI's greatest asset.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You head consumer protection at the RBI. Complaints arise that an AI wallet made purchases a customer did not intend. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** First establish whether the transactions fell within a mandate the customer had authorised, since that determines liability under current rules. Direct the provider to reverse purchases where the mandate or its disclosure was unclear. Then issue guidance requiring clear display of limits, easy cancellation and a log of every action the agent takes. Use the complaints data to decide whether binding rules are needed. **Q2. A bank wants to launch an agentic payment feature for rural customers. What conditions would you impose?** ***Approach:*** Keep default limits low and require explicit opt-in in the local language. Ensure the customer can check and cancel mandates through a simple call or SMS as

well as an app. Train business correspondents to explain the feature, and monitor complaints and fraud rates closely in the first months, scaling up only if they stay low.

Q3. In an interview you are asked: should an AI agent be allowed to spend a citizen's money?

Approach: Yes, within limits the citizen sets and can withdraw at any time. People already allow standing instructions and auto-debits, so the principle is not new. What is new is the agent choosing what to buy, which needs transparency and a duty to act in the customer's interest. The line should be drawn by the size of the risk, not by the novelty of the technology.

8. Society

Both stories are about the promise that Indian institutions make to the young: that the campus will treat them equally and the examination will treat them fairly. A student's death at IIT Bombay has reopened the fight over rules against caste discrimination on campuses, while a four-year-late re-examination in Rajasthan shows what a paper leak costs. In both, the harm was known long before anyone treated it as a political question.

8.1 IIT Bombay Student's Death Sharpens the Fight Over UGC's Stayed Caste-Equity Regulations

THE NEWS Mumbai and New Delhi. Sahil Wakode, a 20-year-old second-year BTech student in IIT Bombay's Department of Energy Science and Engineering, was found dead by suicide in his hostel room on Friday, hours after he was allegedly caught using a mobile phone during a mid-semester examination. The institute said he had uploaded the question paper to an AI platform (ChatGPT, according to The Economic Times) to seek answers, that no disciplinary action had been initiated, and that the instructor, faculty adviser and Head of Department had counselled him and assured him the incident would not harm his career. His family has alleged that faculty member Suryanarayana Doolla, who was invigilating the exam, subjected him to caste-related slurs and harassment for about three months, allegedly on the instructions of senior officials. An FIR has been registered against Prof. Doolla and unnamed senior officials under Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which deals with abetment of suicide, and sections of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act; the Mumbai Crime Branch has taken over the probe. Director Shireesh Kedare told ET there was "absolutely no substance" in the caste allegation and that no such complaint had reached him, adding that he would, "if required", resign. After two days of protest, the administration on Sunday agreed to the students' 18-point charter, the Director signing it on a livestream, The Indian Express reports. The demands include an independent probe with an interim report by September 30 and a final report by October 15, a code of conduct for professors, better counselling and a task force on student distress. On the demand to suspend Prof. Doolla, the Director said, "We will follow the process." The institute's Faculty Forum, led by Prof. Rajkumar S. Pant, defended him as having merely performed invigilation duties. In Delhi, The Hindu reports, the Kshatriya Karni Sena and coalitions of "Savarna" (upper-caste) groups called off a Jantar Mantar protest demanding complete rollback of the UGC's 2026 caste-equity draft regulations — notified in January and stayed by the Supreme Court after protests on several north Indian campuses — after Union Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh met their delegates. Mr. Nadda said the government "will give due consideration to their demands". The paper notes the engagement followed the Dalit student's death. The syllabus link: Articles 15, 17 and 46, and the regulation of higher education.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Caste discrimination on campuses documented after the Rohith Vemula (2016) and Payal Tadvi (2019) deaths → 2012 UGC equity rules found weak → UGC's 2026 caste-equity regulations → upper-caste groups protest, Supreme Court stays them → IIT Bombay student's death revives the demand → Centre opens talks with opponents of the rules

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **The Constitution treats untouchability as a crime, not merely an inequality —** Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination by the State on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and Article 15(2) extends this to access to public places. Article 17 abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form, making enforcement of any disability arising from it an offence in accordance with law. Article 46, a Directive Principle, directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. Article 15(5), added by the 93rd Amendment, 2005, permits reservation in admission to educational institutions, including private ones, other than minority institutions. 2. **The Atrocities Act reaches insults and humiliation, not only violence —** The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 defines specific offences against members of these communities, including intentional insult or intimidation with intent to humiliate in any place within public view, and abuse by caste name. The 2015 amendment expanded the list of offences and created Exclusive Special Courts. After the Supreme Court diluted arrest provisions in Subhash Kashinath

	Mahajan (2018), Parliament inserted Section 18A in 2018 to bar anticipatory bail and remove the requirement of a preliminary inquiry, a change upheld in Prathvi Raj Chauhan (2020). 3. **UGC's power to regulate campuses flows from the 1956 Act —** The University Grants Commission Act, 1956 establishes the UGC to coordinate and maintain standards in higher education, and Section 26 empowers it to make regulations. In 2012 it notified the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, requiring institutions to set up equal opportunity cells and designate an anti-discrimination officer. The mothers of Rohith Vemula, a Hyderabad Central University scholar who died in 2016, and Payal Tadvi, a Mumbai medical resident who died in 2019, petitioned the Supreme Court seeking stronger enforcement, which became the legal backdrop to newer regulations. 4. **Suicide is now a public-health matter in law, and abetment remains a crime —** Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 presumes that a person who attempts suicide is under severe stress and shall not be tried and punished, and requires the government to provide care and rehabilitation. Abetment of suicide remains an offence, now under Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code. In 2025 the Supreme Court constituted a National Task Force on student mental health and suicides in higher educational institutions.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Caste and education is a GS1 and GS2 intersection UPSC returns to —** GS1 covers "social empowerment" and "salient features of Indian society"; GS2 covers "mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections" and "issues relating to education". UPSC has asked whether caste has lost relevance in modern India, and about the persistence of social exclusion despite legal safeguards. 2. **The examiner prizes the two-sided institutional question —** This story has competing claims that are each legitimate in form: a family alleging caste harassment, a faculty body defending due process, and groups who fear misuse of broad discrimination rules. A Mains answer that engages all three, then proposes a design that protects complainants while guaranteeing a fair hearing, is what distinguishes a top-band answer. 3. **Student mental health is an emerging Essay and Ethics theme —** Exam stress, institutional indifference and the role of faculty are natural material for GS4 case studies and Essay topics on education and youth. Kota's student suicides and IIT deaths have made it a recurring public-policy question.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 17 abolishes untouchability and makes the enforcement of any disability arising out of it an offence punishable in accordance with law. • Article 46, a Directive Principle, directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. • Article 15(5), inserted by the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2005, permits special provisions for SCs, STs and socially and educationally backward classes in admission to educational institutions, including private unaided ones, except minority institutions. • Section 18A of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, inserted in 2018, bars the grant of anticipatory bail and dispenses with a preliminary inquiry before registering an FIR. • Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 deals with abetment of

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suicide, corresponding to Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code.
● Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 creates a presumption of severe stress for a person attempting suicide and bars trial and punishment for the attempt.
● The UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012 required institutions to establish equal opportunity cells and appoint anti-discrimination officers.
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<tr><td>ANALYSIS</td><td>
1. The institute's first statement shaped the story before the facts were in — By announcing that the student had uploaded the paper to an AI platform, IIT Bombay framed his death around his own misconduct before any inquiry had begun. Students rightly pointed out that disciplinary matters are normally confidential and that the student cannot now respond. Whatever the truth of the caste allegation, an institution that speaks first about the dead student's fault loses the trust it needs to investigate itself, which is why the demand for an independent probe was inevitable.

2. The Centre talked to the rules' opponents, not to their intended beneficiaries — The Hindu's report records that the government's engagement was with the Karni Sena and Savarna coalitions, whose demand is the complete rollback of the caste-equity regulations. The news peg for that engagement was a Dalit student's death, which is the case the regulations were written for. This does not make the opponents' concerns illegitimate, but a consultation that hears only one side of a stayed regulation risks producing a settlement that the Supreme Court and affected students will not accept.

3. The genuine objection to anti-discrimination rules is about procedure, and it can be met — Those opposing the regulations fear broad definitions and one-sided complaint mechanisms that could be used against faculty and general-category students. That concern has a procedural answer, not a substantive one: clear definitions, time-bound inquiry, a right of reply, and penalties for proven false complaints. Rolling the rules back entirely would return campuses to the 2012 framework, whose weakness was the reason new rules were drafted.

4. Mental-health reform and anti-caste reform are being run as separate tracks, which is a mistake — The students' charter asks for counselling, faculty sensitisation and a task force on distress; the UGC debate is about discrimination. A student who faces caste slurs and exam-hall humiliation experiences both at once. Institutions that set up a counselling centre without an independent grievance route, or an equity cell without mental-health support, will treat half the problem.

5. Faculty due process is also a right, and the Faculty Forum is not wrong to invoke it — An FIR has been registered, not a finding made. Suspending a professor on allegation alone could itself be unfair, and the Director's "we will follow the process" is procedurally correct. The test of the institution is whether that process is fast, independent and transparent, so that neither the family nor the accused faculty member is left under a cloud for years.
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<tr><td>POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION</td><td>
"Legal safeguards against caste discrimination in higher education have failed less for want of law than for want of credible institutional mechanisms." Examine in the context of recent developments. (15 marks, 250 words)
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<tr><td>MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION</td><td>
1. Introduction — Open with the death of a second-year IIT Bombay student amid allegations of caste harassment, and the simultaneous Centre-level talks with groups seeking rollback of the UGC's stayed 2026 caste-equity regulations.

2. Body — The legal architecture — Articles 15, 17 and 46; the Atrocities Act and Section 18A; the UGC Act, 1956 and the 2012 equity regulations; Section 108 BNS; Mental Healthcare Act Section 115. Show that the law is not absent.
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	3. **Body — Why mechanisms fail —** Institutions investigating themselves, first statements that pre-judge, equity cells without independence, faculty solidarity, and students' fear of academic retaliation. Use the 18-point charter as evidence of what students feel is missing. 4. **Body — The fair-process concern —** Acknowledge the objection to broad definitions and possible misuse, and the faculty's right to due process. Argue that procedural safeguards answer this better than rollback. 5. **Conclusion —** Recommend independent, time-bound inquiry bodies with external members, integration of mental-health and anti-discrimination services, annual public reporting of complaints and outcomes, and finalisation of the UGC rules after consultation with both students from marginalised communities and their critics.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Registrar of a central university the morning after a student's suicide amid caste allegations. What is your first public statement?** ***Approach:*** Express condolence, confirm the facts of the death without commenting on the student's conduct, and announce that an independent committee with external members will inquire and report within a fixed time. Say that the institution will cooperate fully with the police. Do not release any information about disciplinary matters, which are confidential and which the student can no longer answer. The first statement decides whether the campus trusts the inquiry; it should protect the process, not the institution's reputation. **Q2. As Vice-Chancellor, faculty demand you protect a colleague named in an FIR while students demand his suspension. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Separate the administrative question from the criminal one. The police investigation will proceed independently; the university's duty is to ensure the investigation and the internal inquiry are not compromised. Moving the faculty member away from teaching and examination duties involving the complainant's batch, without a punitive suspension, can protect both the process and his rights. Explain the decision in writing to both sides, so that neither believes it was taken under pressure. **Q3. In an interview: should anti-discrimination rules in universities cover discrimination against general-category students too?** ***Approach:*** A rule that protects dignity should in principle protect everyone, and a universal definition would blunt the charge that the rules are one-sided. But the rules must also recognise that caste discrimination in India has a specific historical direction, which is why Article 17 and the Atrocities Act exist. A sensible design would have a general anti-harassment framework for all, with specific provisions recognising caste-based humiliation of SC and ST students. Both goals can be met without diluting either.

8.2 Rajasthan Re-holds 2021 Sub-Inspector Exam Four Years After Paper Leak as Exam Integrity Turns Political

THE NEWS Jaipur, Lucknow and New Delhi. The Rajasthan Police Sub-Inspector and Platoon Commander Recruitment Re-examination 2021 was held on Sunday across 11 districts under tight security, PTI reports in The Hindu. A total of 2,18,114 candidates registered for the re-examination, conducted at 666 centres; candidates underwent biometric verification, facial recognition and frisking before entry. The retest came four years after the original recruitment examination was cancelled following a paper leak — the unauthorised release of question papers before an examination. The same day in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath distributed appointment letters to 912 candidates selected through the U.P. Police Recruitment and Promotion Board, and said recruitment before 2017 had been marred by recommendations, illegal transactions, paper leaks and discrimination, while his government had made it transparent and merit-based. He said over 9.5 lakh youth had been given opportunities in the State government since 2017 and another 1 lakh would receive appointment letters within six months. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav responded that youth faced large-scale unemployment and that “reservation has been snatched”; the U.P. Assembly election is due next year. Writing in The Indian Express, economist Rajat Kathuria, pro vice-chancellor at Shiv Nadar University, argued that such grievances may at last be acquiring electoral weight. Drawing on the economist Albert Hirschman’s idea of “exit and voice” — when a service deteriorates, users either complain (voice) or abandon it for an alternative (exit) — he noted that India has an extraordinary capacity for private exit: the inverter, the borewell, the private school, the private clinic. Services the middle class still uses, such as passports and railway reservations, saw stronger reform than elementary schooling, from which better-off households exited. Governments, he argued, earn clearer electoral returns from benefits that are visible and attributable — piped water, LPG, electricity, toilets, cash — which explains “competitive welfarism”. The agitation associated with the Cockroach Janta Party, focused on competitive examinations and paper leaks, is significant because an examination offers one assurance: whatever the inequalities before it, the rules of selection will be fair. A paper leak breaks that assurance in a way that is hard to explain away. The syllabus link: Article 16 on equality of opportunity in public employment, and GS2 on governance and accountability.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Scarce public jobs attract lakhs of applicants → organised paper-leak networks target high-stakes exams → cancellations delay careers by years → retests under biometric and facial checks → exam fairness becomes a campaign theme for ruling and opposition parties alike

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Article 16 makes fair recruitment a fundamental right —** Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State, and Article 16(2) prohibits discrimination in such employment on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or residence. A compromised examination violates this guarantee directly, because selection ceases to be on merit. Courts have therefore upheld cancellation of entire examinations where a leak made it impossible to separate tainted from untainted candidates. 2. **Public Service Commissions are constitutional bodies with a recruitment mandate —** Articles 315 to 323 provide for the Union Public Service Commission and State Public Service Commissions. Article 320 assigns them the duty of conducting examinations for appointments to the services of the Union and the States, and of advising on methods of recruitment and disciplinary matters. Members of a State PSC are appointed by the Governor but can be removed only by the President, after an inquiry by the Supreme Court on grounds of misbehaviour, under Article 317. 3. **Parliament enacted a central anti-leak law in 2024 —** The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 applies to examinations conducted by the UPSC, the Staff Selection Commission, the Railway Recruitment Boards, the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection, the National Testing Agency, and central ministries and departments. Offences are cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable. It provides imprisonment of three to five years and a fine of up to ₹10 lakh for unfair means, and for organised crime involving an examination, five to ten years and a fine of at least ₹1 crore. Many States, including Rajasthan, have their own laws for State examinations. 4. **Hirschman’s framework is a standard lens in public policy —** Albert O. Hirschman’s Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (1970) argued that members of an organisation respond to declining quality either by leaving (exit) or by complaining to effect change (voice), and that easy exit for the most quality-conscious users can weaken voice. Applied to public services, it explains why services abandoned by the middle class tend to deteriorate further. Pratham’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), published since 2005, is the best-known long series on the learning outcomes the op-ed cites.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Examination integrity has become a live governance topic since NEET-UG 2024 —** After the NEET-UG 2024 controversy, the Centre set up a high-level committee under

	former ISRO chairman K. Radhakrishnan to reform the National Testing Agency, and Parliament passed the 2024 anti-unfair-means Act. UPSC can frame questions on the Act's scope, on the functions of PSCs and on institutional reform of testing agencies. 2. **Welfare politics and service delivery are recurring GS2 and Essay themes —** The syllabus names "government policies and interventions for development", "welfare schemes for vulnerable sections" and "transparency and accountability". Essay papers have asked about the relationship between democracy and development; the exit-voice idea and "competitive welfarism" are ready-made analytical tools for such questions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. • Article 320 lays down the functions of the UPSC and State Public Service Commissions, including conducting examinations for appointments to the services. • Under Article 317, a member of a State Public Service Commission is appointed by the Governor but can be removed only by the President, after an inquiry by the Supreme Court in cases of misbehaviour. • The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 covers examinations conducted by the UPSC, SSC, RRBs, IBPS, NTA and central ministries and departments. • Offences under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 are cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable; organised paper-leak crime attracts five to ten years' imprisonment and a fine of at least ₹1 crore. • The concept of "exit" and "voice" as responses to declining quality is associated with the economist Albert O. Hirschman's 1970 book Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. • The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a household-based survey of children's learning outcomes facilitated by the NGO Pratham.
ANALYSIS	1. **A four-year retest is a punishment for the honest candidate as much as a remedy —** Cancelling a compromised exam protects the principle of Article 16, but the 2,18,114 people who registered for Sunday's retest have lost four years of age eligibility, income and career progression. The cost of a leak therefore falls hardest on those who did nothing wrong, while the organisers of the leak are often prosecuted slowly. Any honest evaluation of anti-leak policy should measure the time from leak to fresh result, not only the arrests made. 2. **Technology at the gate treats the symptom, not the source —** Biometrics, facial recognition and frisking stop impersonation and devices in the hall, but most major leaks originate upstream — at printing presses, in transport, or among insiders with access to papers. Security at 666 centres is visible and reassuring; security of the chain of custody before the exam is invisible and harder. The investment should follow the leak points, which usually lie in the supply chain. 3. **Kathuria's argument explains why recruitment claims are now campaign material —** His central claim is that a public service matters electorally only when its failure is visible, attributable and salient. Paper leaks meet all three conditions: they are reported, blame can be assigned, and they touch families who have invested years in preparation. The Uttar Pradesh exchange — 9.5 lakh jobs claimed versus "reservation snatched" — is exactly the transmission mechanism he describes, with both sides treating fair recruitment as a vote-winning issue a year before the election. 4. **The counter-view: exam fairness may be salient without improving schools —** Examinations are a narrow slice of public education. Voters who mobilise against leaks

	are largely aspirants for scarce jobs, not parents of children in failing primary schools, whom Pratham's data has described for decades with little political effect. Examination politics may produce stricter laws and more surveillance while leaving the deeper learning crisis untouched. That limits how far the op-ed's optimism can be stretched. 5. **Visible welfare crowds out invisible quality, and that is a design problem, not a moral one —** If governments are rewarded for goods that households can see and credit — a gas connection, a cash transfer — they will rationally underinvest in teacher quality, clean air or reliable testing, whose benefits are diffuse. The corrective is to make quality visible: publishing learning outcomes by school, exam-integrity audits, and timelines for recruitment. Information is the missing link in the chain the op-ed describes.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Private exit from failing public services weakens the democratic pressure to reform them." Discuss with examples from India, and examine whether recent controversies over examination paper leaks could change this pattern. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define exit and voice in Hirschman's sense in one sentence and anchor the question in the Rajasthan SI re-examination held four years after the original was cancelled for a paper leak. 2. **Body — How exit weakens voice —** Examples of private substitutes: inverters, borewells, private schools and clinics. Contrast passport and railway services, which the middle class still uses and which improved, with elementary schooling, which it largely left. 3. **Body — Why welfare politics favours visible goods —** Visible, attributable benefits such as LPG, piped water and cash transfers earn electoral credit, which explains competitive welfarism; diffuse goods like school quality and clean air do not. 4. **Body — Paper leaks as a possible exception, and its limits —** Explain why a leak violates Article 16 and is salient, attributable and widely felt; cite the 2024 central Act and the UP recruitment exchange. Add the counter-view that exam politics may not reach the learning crisis. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue that information is the lever: publishing school-level learning data, independent audits of examinations and time-bound recruitment calendars can make quality as visible as welfare, and hence electorally rewarded.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Collector of a district hosting 60 re-examination centres after a leak. What do you prioritise?** ***Approach:*** The chain of custody before the exam, not just the gate. I would personally review how papers reach the district, where they are stored overnight, who holds keys and how opening is recorded, with video and dual custody at every step. At centres, biometric and frisking checks matter, but so do simple measures such as random reallocation of invigilators and a ban on phones for staff. After the exam, I would send a written report of any irregularity within hours, because speed of disclosure is what protects the exam if a problem occurs. **Q2. As Chairperson of a State Public Service Commission, how would you shorten the time between a leak and a fresh result?** ***Approach:*** Keep a standby question paper set, printed and secured separately, for every major examination so that a retest can be held within weeks rather than years. Separate the decision to cancel from the criminal investigation, which can proceed in parallel. Publish a recruitment calendar with fixed dates for each stage and report publicly on any slippage. Candidates can accept a retest; what destroys trust is years of uncertainty.

Q3. In an interview: are cash transfers and visible welfare a threat to long-term public investment?

Approach: Not inherently. Cash transfers and household assets have delivered real welfare gains, and dismissing them as mere populism is inaccurate. The risk is imbalance: when only visible goods are rewarded, governments underinvest in education quality, health systems and institutions. The answer is to make those investments visible through published outcomes and to build fiscal rules that protect capital and quality spending, rather than to curb welfare.

9. Internal Security

Both stories are about the same shift: security forces are learning to fight on the adversary's preferred ground. In the Pir Panjal, the Army and J&K Police have stopped chasing militants across the mountains and started living in them; in the Army's new AASHVAST labs, engineers have stopped trusting a drone's invoice and started reading its firmware. Persistence and verification, not firepower, are the new advantages.

9.1 Temporary Operational Bases Let Forces Hold the Pir Panjal and Choke Militant Crossings

THE NEWS SRINAGAR / JAMMU — On September 4, a Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) terrorist was killed in Ashdar Gali, in the upper reaches of the Pir Panjal mountains connecting Kashmir with Jammu's Poonch, after a four-month effort by joint forces of the Army, its elite para forces, J&K Police and paramilitary forces, The Indian Express reported (Bashaarat Masood and Arun Sharma). The operation marked a shift in approach after "a series of setbacks over the last three years": the forces operated out of a Temporary Operational Base (TOB) — a forward camp that lets troops stay in the mountains rather than raid and withdraw. "This is a temporary arrangement to maintain a more permanent footprint in the difficult mountain terrain," a senior police officer said, explaining that forces now stay deployed for periods ranging from more than 10 days to several months, using a Gujjar dhok (shack) or a cave as shelter where available and otherwise operating from dense forest. The mountains are divided into three zones: Army paratroopers hold the upper reaches, using drones to watch large swathes of terrain; the middle range is manned by the Rashtriya Rifles, the Army's anti-insurgency force, or by joint teams of J&K Police and paramilitary forces; the lower reaches are usually with the police and paramilitary. After the Pahalgam attack in April last year, which killed 25 tourists and one local, J&K Police raised new elite units within its Special Operations Group — 'Snow Leopards', trained for high-altitude winter warfare, and 'Markhor', trained for gunfights in dense forests. Officers said militants had held advantages at height, including stationary vantage points and American M4 carbines; special troops now carry comparable weapons and night-vision devices. The Pir Panjal divides Jammu from Kashmir: to its south lie Poonch and Rajouri, which connect to the Line of Control; it also links Kashmir to the Chenab Valley districts of Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban, and stretches to Gulmarg and Baramulla. The Poonch-Rajouri axis was cleared under Operation Sarp Vinash, launched in 2003, and declared militant-free in 2012. Earlier, pressure on one side of the range pushed militants to the other; the TOBs, placed on "intelligence inputs and ground situation analysis", remove that advantage. Most last a few weeks; the one at Ashdar Gali, above the Doodhpathri meadow, has been held for months. Officials still flag changing overground worker networks and new hideouts.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Poonch-Rajouri declared militant-free in 2012 → militancy shifts back into forested Pir Panjal routes → forces suffer setbacks in raid-and-return operations → Pahalgam attack prompts new SOG units and a doctrine of sustained presence → TOBs deny militants the escape route across the range

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Pir Panjal is the wall between Jammu and the Valley** — The Pir Panjal range is part of the Lesser (Middle) Himalaya, running north-west to south-east and separating the Kashmir Valley from the Jammu region. Passes and routes across it include the Banihal pass, which the Jawahar tunnel and the newer Banihal-Qazigund tunnel bypass, and the Pir ki Gali on the historic Mughal Road linking Shopian with Poonch-Rajouri. South of the range, Poonch and Rajouri border the Line of Control, which makes the forests a transit zone for infiltrators.
2. **The Rashtriya Rifles is a counter-insurgency force drawn from the Army** — The Rashtriya Rifles was raised in 1990 as a dedicated counter-insurgency force for Jammu and Kashmir. Its personnel come on deputation from across the Army's regiments and arms, and it operates under the Ministry of Defence. It allows the regular Army to focus on the Line of Control while the RR holds the hinterland.
3. **Policing in J&K is now a Union subject in practice** — Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, J&K became a Union Territory with a legislature, but 'public order' and 'police' remain with the Lieutenant Governor, acting under the Union Home Ministry. The Special Operations Group is J&K Police's counter-terror wing. Joint

	operations are coordinated through the Unified Headquarters, which brings together the Army, police, central armed police forces and intelligence agencies. 4. **The legal basis for operations is AFSPA and UAPA —** The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990 gives the armed forces powers of search, arrest and use of force in 'disturbed areas'. Lashkar-e-Toiba is a banned terrorist organisation listed in the First Schedule of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. Overground workers — people who provide shelter, logistics and information to militants without carrying arms — can be prosecuted under UAPA.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 asks about security challenges in border areas and their management —** The syllabus lists 'security challenges and their management in border areas' and 'linkages of organised crime with terrorism'. UPSC has asked about the role of the security forces in J&K and about infiltration across the LoC. 2. **Geography questions follow security headlines —** Prelims regularly tests Himalayan ranges and passes. The Pir Panjal, Banihal and the districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Doda and Kishtwar are likely map-based questions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Pir Panjal range belongs to the Lesser (Middle) Himalaya and separates the Kashmir Valley from the Jammu region. • The Rashtriya Rifles was raised in 1990 as a counter-insurgency force of the Indian Army under the Ministry of Defence. • The Mughal Road crosses the Pir Panjal at Pir ki Gali, linking Shopian in Kashmir with Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu. • Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, police and public order in the Union Territory of J&K rest with the Lieutenant Governor, under the Union Home Ministry. • Lashkar-e-Toiba is listed as a terrorist organisation in the First Schedule of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. • The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act was enacted in 1990.
ANALYSIS	1. **Persistence beats speed in mountain counter-insurgency —** The old approach — launch an operation, search, withdraw — let militants who knew the terrain outwait the forces. A TOB inverts that: the forces become the permanent presence and the militants the visitors. Staying for weeks or months costs more in logistics and fatigue, but denies militants rest and supply. The Ashdar Gali result after four months shows that patience is the doctrine, not a by-product. 2. **The real target is movement, not numbers —** The officers' key point is that pressure south of the range pushed militants north and vice versa. By holding routes on both sides, the TOBs turn the range from a corridor into a trap. That makes success measurable in reduced crossings and fewer attacks in Poonch-Rajouri, rather than in kill counts alone. Metrics that reward kills can distort operations; metrics that reward denial of movement do not. 3. **Layered deployment matches forces to terrain —** Paratroopers at the top, Rashtriya Rifles or joint teams in the middle and police at the bottom is a sensible division of labour. The highest reaches need the best-trained and best-equipped troops, while the lower reaches need local knowledge and intelligence that only police have. The creation of Snow Leopards and Markhor shows the police moving up the terrain too. The risk is coordination failure between layers; the Unified Headquarters must ensure information flows faster than militants move.

	4. The weak point remains the support network — Officials admit that overground worker networks keep changing and new hideouts appear. A military presence in the mountains cannot by itself cut the food, shelter and information that come from villages below. Relations with Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, whose dhoks the forces use, are therefore decisive. If those communities feel used or harassed, the forces lose the intelligence on which TOB placement depends. **5. The counter-view: long deployments carry human costs —** Troops living for months in forests and caves face fatigue, weather and isolation, and the setbacks of recent years included losses of soldiers in ambushes. Sustained presence also raises the chance of friction with local people. The approach is sound, but it must be supported by rotation, medical evacuation, drones and communications so that it does not simply expose more soldiers for longer.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In mountainous terrain, the side that stays longest usually wins." Examine the changing counter-terror strategy in the Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir and its limitations. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	**1. Introduction —** Open with the September 4 Ashdar Gali operation after a four-month effort and define Temporary Operational Bases. **2. Body — why the Pir Panjal matters —** Geography: link between Kashmir, Poonch-Rajouri and the Chenab Valley; proximity to the LoC; dense forests; history of Operation Sarp Vinash and the 2012 militant-free declaration. **3. Body — the new strategy —** Sustained presence through TOBs, three-tier deployment, SOG's Snow Leopards and Markhor units, drones, night vision and better weapons. **4. Body — limitations —** Changing overground worker networks, dependence on local communities, strain on troops, need for coordination through the Unified Headquarters. **5. Conclusion —** Argue that military persistence must be paired with intelligence, community trust and development to make gains durable.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As SSP of Poonch, what would you prioritise to support the TOB strategy?** ***Approach:*** Intelligence from villages is the core input for placing TOBs, so I would strengthen community policing and trust with Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. I would ensure that police teams in the lower reaches are trained and equipped to share information quickly with the Army above. I would monitor overground worker networks through legal means and financial tracking. And I would make sure that complaints of harassment are addressed promptly, since trust is an operational asset. **Q2. Security forces use Gujjar dhoks as bases. A family complains its shelter was occupied without consent. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Meet the family, record the complaint and inform the Army unit through proper channels. Where use is necessary, it should be with consent and compensation. Taking shelters without consent turns potential informants into opponents. A clear protocol for such use should be agreed at the Unified Headquarters. **Q3. An interview board asks whether a long-term military presence in the mountains is sustainable.** ***Approach:*** It is sustainable only if supported by rotation, logistics and technology such as drones and communications, and only if casualties are minimised. It should be temporary in each place but permanent as a pattern, which is what TOBs attempt. Over time, as militant movement falls, the presence can be reduced. Sustainability also depends on political and development measures that reduce local support for

	militancy.

9.2 Army's AASHVAST Labs Will Scan Drone Firmware for Hidden Chinese Code Before Deployment

THE NEWS NEW DELHI — The Indian Army will soon operate six AASHVAST labs across the country, where all its drones, and eventually CCTV cameras, will undergo mandatory inspection to identify and eliminate firmware-level vulnerabilities, The Indian Express reported (Amrita Nayak Dutta). Firmware is the low-level software built into a device's chips that controls how its hardware behaves. AASHVAST stands for Assessment and Analysis of Electronic Systems Hardware for Vulnerabilities and Security Threats. One lab has been inaugurated in Delhi, with at least five more planned in the coming months. The Firmware Analysis and Validation Suite was developed by QuickPay Pvt Ltd for the Directorate General of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering (DG EME). The Army published a Request for Proposal in April this year to procure customised licensed software for validating firmware and embedded systems in electronic components, including UAV components; on August 14, its Additional Directorate General of Public Information said on X that the facility, "aligned with the national vision of #AtmanirbharBharat", would increase cyber resilience. So far, drones procured by the Army had not had firmware vulnerabilities checked. Such flaws can be introduced during manufacture or upgrade: unused code or hidden commands invoked at a certain location could stop a drone from performing its task. The labs can detect about 14 types of vulnerability, including geospatial ones such as a malfunction over a certain location, bugs that stop a drone from reaching its preset destination, hidden code that terminates a flight before the target, and time and location bugs. They will also look for Chinese or other foreign-origin active components, hidden passwords, embedded keys, remote access tools and location-based security controls. Future CCTV cameras will be inspected for Chinese proprietary protocols. "There is no mechanism to determine what is embedded within the silicon. What is visible is merely the invoice," said a person involved in setting up the lab, adding that the checks would prevent Chinese components being misrepresented as 'made in India'. The paper noted that the Army is buying drones at scale through the emergency procurement route, many for use along the eastern borders; India has previously prohibited domestic military drone makers from using Chinese parts, and in 2025 the Army Design Bureau submitted a framework to the Ministry of Defence to eliminate Chinese-origin components from UAVs. QuickPay Director Rajib Roy said the aim was to prevent enemy interference in contested areas.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Drones become central to modern war → Army buys at scale through emergency procurement → components sourced from China enter 'Indian' drones through invoices that hide true origin → firmware backdoors could disable drones in contested zones → AASHVAST labs make firmware inspection mandatory

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Supply-chain security is now a formal part of India's security policy —** The National Security Directive on the Telecommunication Sector, approved in December 2020, requires telecom operators to buy equipment only from 'trusted sources' certified by the National Cyber Security Coordinator. The logic is the same as AASHVAST's: the risk lies not only in what a device does but in who built its components. Hardware and firmware backdoors are hard to detect after deployment, so screening must happen before.

2. **India's drone policy combines liberalisation with import restriction —** The Drone Rules, 2021 liberalised civilian drone use by reducing approvals and creating the Digital Sky platform. A Production Linked Incentive scheme for drones and drone components was approved in 2021. In February 2022 the government banned the import of foreign drones, with exemptions for defence, security and R&D, to build domestic manufacturing — but components continued to be imported.

3. **India's cyber-security institutions have statutory roots in the IT Act —** Section 70A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 provides for the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), and Section 70B for CERT-In, the national agency for cyber incident response. The Defence Cyber Agency handles military cyber operations. Firmware testing in the Army is a defence-specific addition to this civil framework.

	4. **Emergency procurement trades speed for scrutiny —** Under the Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020, the armed forces can use emergency procurement powers to buy urgently needed equipment quickly, bypassing the longer standard process. This was used after the 2020 Galwan clash and later. The risk is reduced time for quality and security checks, which is why post-purchase testing such as AASHVAST matters.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 lists cyber security and the role of technology in security —** The syllabus names 'basics of cyber security' and 'challenges to internal security through communication networks'. UPSC has asked about cyber threats to critical infrastructure and about indigenisation in defence. 2. **Defence indigenisation is asked with an eye on quality, not only quantity —** Questions on Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence increasingly ask about capability and supply chains. This story gives a concrete example of why 'made in India' labels need verification.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 designates CERT-In as the national agency for incident response. • Section 70A of the IT Act provides for the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre. • The Drone Rules, 2021 introduced the Digital Sky platform for drone approvals. • The import of foreign drones was banned in February 2022, with exemptions for defence, security and R&D purposes. • The Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020 governs capital procurement by the Ministry of Defence. • Firmware is software embedded in a device's hardware that controls its basic functions.
ANALYSIS	1. **An invoice is not a certificate of origin —** The most important sentence in the report is that the invoice shows where a part was bought, not where it was made. Import bans and 'make in India' rules that rely on paperwork can be bypassed by routing Chinese components through third countries or local assemblers. Firmware and component analysis verifies the product itself. That shifts enforcement from documents to evidence, which is more reliable. 2. **Firmware is the ideal hiding place for sabotage —** Hidden code that activates at a specific location or time would pass every ordinary field test and fail only in a real operation. That is precisely the danger for drones used along the eastern borders, where an adversary knows the likely areas of use. A lab that tests for geospatial and time-based triggers addresses the threat that ordinary acceptance trials miss. This is a genuine capability gap being closed. 3. **The lab is only as good as its scope and independence —** Six labs for the whole Army is a start, but drones are being bought in large numbers. The suite itself was developed by a private company; the Army must ensure the testing tools are secure and independently audited. Over time, testing should extend to all electronics, not only drones and CCTV. The same logic applies to the Navy and Air Force. 4. **The counter-view: strict origin rules raise costs and slow supply —** India's drone industry still depends on imported components such as motors, batteries and chips, many from China. Strict exclusion may raise prices and slow deliveries when forces need drones urgently. The practical answer is risk-based: exclude components that can carry hidden code, such as controllers and communication modules, while allowing passive parts from trusted sources until domestic supply grows.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Indigenisation of defence equipment is meaningless without verification of its supply chain." Discuss in the context of the Indian Army's initiative to test drones for firmware-level vulnerabilities. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Introduce AASHVAST: six labs, mandatory firmware inspection of drones and later CCTV, one lab already in Delhi. 2. **Body — the threat —** Chinese components in drones used on eastern borders; firmware backdoors, geospatial and time-based triggers; invoices that hide true origin. 3. **Body — India's policy framework —** Drone import ban 2022, PLI for drones, Army Design Bureau framework of 2025, telecom trusted-source rules, CERT-In and NCIIPC. 4. **Body — challenges —** Scale of procurement, dependence on imported components, cost, need for independent audit of testing tools. 5. **Conclusion —** Argue for supply-chain verification as a standing part of defence procurement and a push for domestic chips and controllers.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As an officer in the Directorate General of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering, how would you roll out mandatory testing without delaying urgent drone supplies?** ***Approach:*** I would prioritise testing by risk: drones deployed on the eastern borders and those with the most sensitive functions first. Testing could be built into the acceptance process so that it runs in parallel with other trials. Vendors would be told the requirements in advance, so they can supply clean firmware. Where a drone fails, the vendor must fix it at its own cost within a set time. **Q2. A domestic vendor's drone is found to contain a Chinese controller despite a 'made in India' declaration. What action should follow?** ***Approach:*** The drone should be rejected and the vendor asked to explain. If misrepresentation is established, contractual penalties and possible debarment should follow, and the matter may be referred for investigation. The finding should be shared with other services so they can check their own purchases. Consistent enforcement is what makes the rule credible. **Q3. An interview board asks whether India should ban all Chinese electronics in government use.** ***Approach:*** A blanket ban may not be practical immediately because supply chains are deeply integrated. The better approach is risk-based: strict exclusion in defence, critical infrastructure and surveillance systems, with testing and certification elsewhere. At the same time India should invest in domestic manufacturing of key components. Security and economic capacity must grow together.

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 Invigilator, the Phone and the Charter of Eighteen Demands

> ***SCENARIO*** You are the Director of a premier technical institute. On Friday a 20-year-old second-year undergraduate died by suicide in his hostel room, hours after an invigilator allegedly found him with a mobile phone during a mid-semester examination. The institute's first public statement said he had uploaded the paper to an AI platform to seek answers. His parents have filed a police complaint alleging that he was mentally tortured by the faculty member and faced caste-based harassment; the invigilating professor is named in the FIR, and the city's crime branch has taken over the probe, saying it will establish whether the death followed from being caught in the examination or from caste harassment. For two days students have staged a sit-in at the main gate. They have submitted an 18-point charter: the professor's immediate suspension, an independent probe with an interim report by 30 September and a final report by 15 October, an open house with senior officials, a code of conduct for professors, mental-health sensitisation for faculty, better in-person counselling, changes to the disciplinary committee's procedure, and a task force of students, faculty, mental-health professionals and outside experts. Students say your first statement accused a dead student who cannot defend himself and breached the rule that disciplinary matters are confidential. The Faculty Forum has publicly defended the professor, saying he followed approved procedure and that his reputation is being tarnished. Nationally, the government has just agreed to talks with groups demanding complete rollback of draft UGC regulations on caste discrimination in higher education, which were notified in January and stayed by the Supreme Court. On a livestream, you have already signed the charter; on the suspension you said, "We will follow the process."

Q1. Was the institute's first public statement, attributing AI use to the student, ethically defensible? What should it have said?

Q2. How do you balance the family's allegation of caste harassment against the professor's right to due process, when both the students and the Faculty Forum demand that you take their side?

Q3. Having signed the charter under pressure, which commitments do you honour in full, and which must be reframed?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **The first statement protected the institution at the cost of a dead student's dignity —** An institution's first words after a death set the moral tone of everything that follows. By publicly stating that the student had used an AI platform to cheat, the administration made an allegation against someone who could not answer it, disclosed a disciplinary matter that its own rules keep confidential, and implied a cause of death before the police had begun. Even if every word was accurate, it was the wrong thing to say first. The appropriate statement would have expressed grief, confirmed the facts of the death only, stated that the police had been informed and that the institute would cooperate fully, and offered support to the family and to students. The honest course now is to acknowledge publicly that the statement should not have been made in that form. An apology of this kind costs the institute little and restores some trust; defending the statement would cost it the students.

2. **Separate the three processes, and never let one decide another —** There are three distinct questions: the police investigation into whether an offence was committed, including abetment or caste harassment; the institute's internal inquiry into whether its procedures and staff behaved properly; and the systemic review of student distress. Each has its own standard of proof and its own authority. The professor's employment status is a matter for the internal process under the service rules, informed by the police findings but not dictated by crowd or colleague pressure. Explaining this distinction clearly to students and faculty is not evasion; it is the only way to protect both a grieving family's right to a real investigation and an employee's right not to be punished on accusation alone.

3. **On suspension, decide on the facts of the risk, not on the volume of the demand —** Suspension pending inquiry is not a punishment under most service rules; it is a protective step used where the employee's presence could influence witnesses or the inquiry, or where the charges are grave. An FIR naming a faculty member in connection with a student's death, with an allegation of caste harassment, is a grave matter, and the professor's continued role in teaching and examining the same department's students could reasonably be seen as affecting the inquiry. A reasonable middle course is to relieve him of examination and supervisory duties pending the inquiry, with pay and without any finding, and to say

so publicly with the reason. That respects the process the Director promised, answers the students' fear that nothing will change, and does not declare the professor guilty.

4. **Make the independent probe genuinely independent, and keep its deadline —** The students' demand for an independent inquiry is reasonable because the institute is itself a party to what happened. The inquiry should be headed by someone outside the institute, such as a retired judge, with at least one member with expertise in caste discrimination and one mental-health professional, and a student observer. Its terms of reference should cover the examination incident, the handling of the student afterwards, the allegation of caste harassment and the adequacy of support systems. The dates in the charter — 30 September for an interim report, 15 October for the final — should be accepted if feasible and, if not, replaced with realistic dates announced in public. Missing a date without explanation will do more damage than setting a later one.

5. **Build the systems the charter asks for, because the suicide is not only this case —** Codes of conduct for faculty, sensitisation on caste and mental health, accessible in-person counselling, and a fair disciplinary process with a right to be heard before any adverse step are not concessions to protest; they are standard good practice that premier institutions have been slow to adopt. The disciplinary procedure matters most here: a student found with a phone should have a clear, humane process, with a counsellor informed immediately, and never be left alone in shame. An equal opportunity cell with real independence and SC/ST liaison officers who are trusted by students can catch harassment early. The national debate over the stayed UGC draft regulations does not stop an institute from doing what is plainly right within its own campus.

6. **Hold the community together by speaking to both sides in the same voice —** The students see a system that failed a Dalit student; the faculty see a colleague condemned for doing his duty. Both fears are real. The Director should meet both groups, and say the same thing to each: that the truth will be established by a fair process, that no one will be punished on allegation and no allegation will be buried, and that the institute will change where it has failed. Consistency is the Director's best asset. A leader who tells each group what it wants to hear will soon lose both.

Case 2 — The Drone That Worked Everywhere Except Over the Border

> ***SCENARIO*** You are a Brigadier heading the Army's new AASHVAST firmware-testing lab in Delhi, the first of six planned across the country. AASHVAST — Assessment and Analysis of Electronic Systems Hardware for Vulnerabilities and Security Threats — is a firmware analysis and validation suite developed by a private Indian firm for the Directorate General of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering. Until now, drones procured by the Army have not been checked for firmware-level vulnerabilities. The labs can detect around 14 types of flaw, including geospatial faults that make a drone malfunction over a particular location, hidden or unused code that could make it terminate before reaching its target, and time or location bugs that let it work normally except at certain times or places. They also look for Chinese or other foreign-origin active components, hidden passwords, embedded keys and remote access tools. India has already barred domestic military drone makers from using Chinese-made parts, and in 2025 the Army Design Bureau gave the Ministry of Defence a framework to eliminate Chinese-origin components from UAVs. Many of the Army's drones are being bought through the emergency procurement route and are meant for the eastern borders. Your first batch of tests has found a hidden location-based routine in the firmware of drones supplied by a well-connected Indian vendor who had certified that his product contained no Chinese parts. The drones are already with units in the field. The vendor says the routine is harmless legacy code from a sub-supplier. Your superiors are worried about delays in induction, and the vendor has hinted that others in the industry are no different.

Q1. Do you recommend withdrawing the drones from the field immediately, even though that will leave units short of capability?

Q2. The vendor certified the absence of Chinese parts. How do you treat a false or careless certificate, and what does that mean for other suppliers?

Q3. How do you balance the push for speed through emergency procurement with the need for security testing?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **A hidden location-based routine is a security finding, not a paperwork error —** The whole purpose of the lab is to detect exactly what has been found: code that behaves differently in certain places. Whether it is malicious or careless legacy code, its effect in combat could be the same — a drone that fails where it is most needed, or one that reveals where it is. The finding must be reported in writing, up the chain of command and to the procurement authorities, with the technical

evidence, without softening it because of the vendor's connections or the inconvenience. An officer who dilutes a security finding to avoid trouble has turned a testing lab into a rubber stamp.

2. **Withdraw or restrict on the basis of risk, with a plan to cover the gap —** Leaving compromised equipment with units risks lives and operations, but pulling everything at once may leave soldiers without surveillance. The balanced course is immediate restriction: ground the affected drones in operationally sensitive sectors, especially along the eastern borders, and restrict any remaining use to non-critical tasks under supervision until the firmware is cleaned or replaced. At the same time, recommend alternative equipment or reallocation from other units. Commanders should decide with full information, and the lab's duty is to give them that information quickly and clearly.

3. **A false certificate must have consequences, applied without favour —** The vendor certified that no Chinese parts were used, and the ban on such components exists precisely because of these risks. Whether the certificate was dishonest or merely careless, the vendor accepted responsibility for his supply chain when he signed it. The contract's remedies — rejection, replacement at the vendor's cost, penalties and, if deliberate deception is shown, blacklisting and referral for investigation — should be pursued through proper channels. Applying these firmly to a well-connected vendor sends the most useful signal to the industry; letting him off would tell every supplier that certificates are formalities.

4. **Treat the vendor's hint as a reason to test everyone, not to excuse anyone —** The suggestion that others are no different is either a threat or useful intelligence. Treat it as the latter. It justifies testing every drone already in service, not only new purchases, beginning with those deployed in the most sensitive areas. It also points to the real weakness, which lies with sub-suppliers deep in the chain. Require vendors to provide a full bill of materials and firmware provenance, and to give the lab access to source code or equivalent for critical modules as a condition of future contracts.

5. **Speed and security are not opposites if testing is built into procurement —** Emergency procurement exists because operational needs cannot always wait for long processes, but speed that delivers compromised equipment is a false economy. The answer is to make firmware testing a fixed, time-bound stage in every emergency purchase, with the six planned labs scaled up to handle volume, and with vendors allowed to submit samples early for testing. A clear standard, known in advance, also rewards honest domestic manufacturers who invest in clean supply chains and supports the Atmanirbhar Bharat goal the Army itself has invoked.

6. **Protect the integrity of the lab itself —** The lab was developed by a private company, and its findings will affect the business of other private companies. Its credibility depends on neutrality and confidentiality. Findings should be documented to a standard that can stand scrutiny, vendors should get a chance to respond technically, and no one outside the formal chain should see results in advance. An officer who keeps the lab's processes clean ensures that when it says 'this drone is safe', commanders can trust it.

Case 3 — The Pacemaker Imported at ₹25,000 and Billed at ₹2 Lakh

SCENARIO You are the Commissioner of Food and Drug Administration in a large State. Your inspections, and representations from the domestic medical device industry, show that patients are routinely charged many times the real cost of devices. The industry association's published figures are stark: a pacemaker imported at ₹25,000 billed to patients at over ₹2 lakh; syringes costing ₹3 at the factory gate sold for ₹30; heart valves imported at ₹4 lakh marked up to ₹26 lakh. Hospitals choose the devices, often guided by margin, and patients cannot bargain. Devices have been regulated for quality and safety since the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, but pricing is still largely handled through the Drugs (Prices Control) Order designed for medicines. In 2017 the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority capped coronary stent prices, cutting them by 70 to 85% without shortages, and knee implant prices later fell by up to 69%. The domestic industry now proposes capping trade margins at the first point of sale recorded for GST — the landed price for imports and the ex-factory price for domestic makers — at 50% for devices above ₹1 lakh, 66% for devices between ₹1,000 and ₹1 lakh and 75% for devices below ₹1,000, with a 12-18 month pilot on pacemakers, heart valves, cardiac catheters, syringes, IV sets and intra-ocular lenses. Importers argue this targets them unfairly. Private hospitals say device margins subsidise their other services and warn that caps will raise procedure charges. Price control is a central subject, but hospital billing and inspection are in your hands, and a patient's family has just shown you a bill with a device marked up nearly tenfold.

Q1. What can you do within your own powers, while pricing policy is decided at the national level?

Q2. The proposal comes from domestic manufacturers who stand to benefit. How much weight should that interest carry in your assessment?

Q3. Hospitals claim device margins cross-subsidise other care. Is that a legitimate defence of the mark-up?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Use your own powers fully before asking for new ones —** Price fixing is a central matter under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order and the NPPA, but the State regulator is not powerless. You can enforce existing ceiling prices where devices are already notified, check that MRPs are correctly printed and not exceeded, act on overcharging complaints, and require hospitals to display the prices of common devices and itemise them in bills. Publishing a comparison of what different hospitals charge for the same device costs nothing and helps patients and insurers. These steps do not need a new law and they show that the problem is being taken seriously.

2. **Refer the evidence upward in a form the national regulator can use —** The figures quoted by the industry association are powerful but come from an interested party. Your office should verify them independently, using import data, invoices seized in inspections and hospital bills, and send a documented report to the NPPA and the Union Health Ministry recommending action on specific device categories. Evidence from a State regulator carries weight because it is neutral and grounded in enforcement. The stent and knee-implant precedents show that well-evidenced caps can work without causing shortages.

3. **Judge the proposal on its merits, whoever proposes it —** That domestic manufacturers would benefit does not make their proposal wrong; industry often knows where the distortions are. But their interest means the design must be tested for fairness. A trade-margin cap at the first point of sale treats imports and domestic products on the same basis, which is its main strength. Its weakness is that margins set as percentages can still allow high absolute mark-ups on expensive devices, and that importers could shift profit into the landed price. A pilot, as proposed, with independent monitoring and a review built in, is a sensible way to find out before applying it widely.

4. **Cross-subsidy is an explanation, not a justification —** Hospitals may indeed use device margins to fund other services, but hiding the cost of care inside the price of a pacemaker is neither transparent nor fair. It loads the cost on the sickest patients at their most vulnerable moment, when they cannot compare or refuse. If hospitals need to recover costs, they should do so through transparent procedure and service charges that patients and insurers can see. Regulation should push toward honest, itemised pricing rather than protect hidden margins.

5. **Protect supply while protecting price —** The main risk of price control is that suppliers withdraw products or reduce quality. You should monitor availability of the capped devices closely during any pilot, require advance notice of discontinuation, and work with the NPPA on mechanisms that allow price revision for genuine innovation. Protecting patients from exploitation is pointless if they then cannot get the device at all.

6. **Answer the family in front of you —** Policy takes months; the family has a bill today. Examine the bill against any applicable ceiling price and the printed MRP. If there is overcharging, order a refund and act against the hospital. If the charge is legal but exploitative, tell the family honestly that current rules allow it, record the case in the report you send upward, and help them approach the hospital or their insurer. A regulator who explains the limits of the law truthfully earns more trust than one who promises what he cannot deliver.

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
Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW)	India's external intelligence agency, established on 21 September 1968 under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after the 1962 and 1965 wars exposed gaps in foreign intelligence, which until then was handled by the Intelligence Bureau. Its first chief was Rameshwar Nath Kao. It functions under the Cabinet Secretariat and is not a statutory body, whereas the Intelligence Bureau handles internal intelligence under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
Ebola and the Ervebo vaccine	Ebola virus disease is a severe haemorrhagic fever first identified in 1976 near the Ebola river in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, spread through contact with body fluids. Ervebo (rVSV-ZEBOV) is a live vaccine effective against the Zaire strain of the virus. Ituri and North Kivu are eastern DR Congo provinces bordering Uganda and Rwanda, and today's trial tests whether it protects against a different strain.
East Sea / Sea of Japan	The marginal sea of the western Pacific bounded by the Korean Peninsula, Japan and the Russian Far East; Koreans call it the East Sea. North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and is under UN Security Council sanctions, including resolutions that prohibit its ballistic missile launches.
Ultra-supercritical thermal power	A coal-fired technology that operates steam at temperatures and pressures above the critical point of water (about 374°C and 22 MPa) at higher levels than supercritical units, raising efficiency and reducing coal use and carbon dioxide per unit of electricity. The 3,200 MW Chapar plant in Assam's Dhubri district is to be the largest power plant in the Northeast.
Veer Guardian	A bilateral air exercise between the Indian Air Force and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force; its 2026 edition, the second, is being held at Air Force Station Jodhpur. India and Japan are a Special Strategic and Global Partnership and also hold the JIMEX naval and Dharma Guardian army exercises. Tejas is India's indigenous Light Combat Aircraft, designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
Offer for sale (OFS) in an IPO	An initial public offering may include a fresh issue, in which the company raises new capital, and an offer for sale, in which existing shareholders sell their shares and the money goes to them, not to the company. IPOs are governed by the SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2018. The National Stock Exchange was incorporated in 1992 and began trading in 1994.
FCNR(B) deposits	Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) accounts are term deposits that non-resident Indians hold in Indian banks in freely convertible foreign currencies. Because the deposit is held in foreign currency, the exchange rate risk is borne by the bank, not the depositor. In 2013 the RBI ran a special swap window for FCNR(B) deposits to stabilise the rupee and build reserves.
Criminal defamation	Defamation is a criminal offence under Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code, with a maximum sentence of two years, a fine, or community service. In Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016) the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of criminal defamation as a reasonable restriction under Article 19(2).
Baloch Liberation Army	A separatist armed group seeking independence for Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province by area and home to the Gwadar port on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The United States designated it a Foreign Terrorist Organisation in 2025. Pakistan alleges Indian backing, which India denies.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
National Gallery of Modern Art	Established in 1954 at Jaipur House, New Delhi, under the Ministry of Culture, as India's premier institution for modern and contemporary art; it has branches in Mumbai and Bengaluru. Tyeb Mehta, S.H. Raza and F.N. Souza were members of the Progressive Artists' Group founded in Bombay in 1947.
Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly	Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, J&K is a Union Territory with a legislature, like Puducherry, while Ladakh is a Union Territory without one. The Lieutenant Governor has powers over police and public order, and the 2024 elections produced the first elected Assembly after the abrogation of Article 370's special status. The Assembly has 90 elected seats.
Drought declaration	Drought is declared by State governments, following the Manual for Drought Management of the Ministry of Agriculture, which uses rainfall deficiency and dry spells as 'trigger' indicators and then impact indicators such as vegetation indices, soil moisture, area sown and crop condition, confirmed by field 'ground-truthing'. Relief is funded from the State Disaster Response Fund and, for severe drought, the National Disaster Response Fund under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
Eco-sensitive areas and the Western Ghats	Eco-sensitive areas are notified by the Union Ministry of Environment under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to regulate activities around protected or ecologically fragile regions. The Gadgil committee (2011) recommended treating most of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive; the Kasturirangan working group (2013) narrowed this to about 37% of the range. The Western Ghats is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2012 and one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.
Project Cheetah	Launched in September 2022 as the world's first intercontinental relocation of a large carnivore, bringing cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa, and later Botswana, to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary on the Madhya Pradesh–Rajasthan border is the second site. The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952 and is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme	Introduced in 2010 for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers such as DAP and SSP, under which the government fixes a per-kilogram subsidy for nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur, while retail prices are nominally left to companies. Urea remains outside this scheme, with a fixed retail price. Sulphur is used to make sulphuric acid, needed to process rock phosphate into phosphatic fertiliser.
Copyright Act, 1957 — fair dealing	Section 52 lists acts that do not infringe copyright, including fair dealing for private use, research, criticism and review, and reproduction by teachers and pupils in the course of instruction. Sections 52(1)(b) and (c) protect transient and incidental storage in electronic transmission, which is the safe harbour for internet intermediaries. In the Delhi University photocopy case (2016-17), the Delhi High Court read the educational exception broadly.
Drugs (Prices Control) Order and NPPA	The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and sets ceiling prices for scheduled formulations listed in the National List of Essential Medicines. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, set up in 1997 under the Department of Pharmaceuticals, enforces it. It capped coronary stent prices in 2017 and knee implant prices later that year.
Medical Devices Rules, 2017	Framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and in force from 1 January 2018, these rules regulate medical devices separately from drugs on a risk-based classification from Class A (low risk) to Class D (high risk). Licensing for Class A and B devices is with State authorities, and for Class C and D with the Central Licensing Authority, the Drugs Controller General of India.
WHO salt guideline	The World Health Organization recommends that adults consume less than 5 grams of salt a day, equivalent to under 2 grams of sodium. Excess sodium is a major cause of high blood pressure, a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Urinary sodium measurement is the standard method for estimating actual salt intake in population surveys.

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
Companies Act, 2013 — Articles of Association	The Articles of Association are a company's internal rulebook on management, board procedure and shareholder rights, and bind the company and its members as a contract under Section 10. They can be altered only by a special resolution under Section 14. In Tata Sons v. Cyrus Mistry (2021) the Supreme Court upheld Tata Sons' articles and the removal of Mistry as executive chairman.
Children's data under the DPDP Act, 2023	The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 treats anyone under 18 as a child and requires verifiable parental consent before processing a child's personal data. It bars tracking, behavioural monitoring and targeted advertising directed at children, subject to exemptions notified by the government. The Data Protection Board of India adjudicates breaches.

Source note: All items are drawn from The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 21 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 rule proves its worth on the day it is inconvenient.

Themes: Institutions · Ethics · Governance

On 17 September, the board of one of India's oldest business groups met in Mumbai to decide whether its chairman should continue for another five years. One of the directors nominated by the group's majority shareholder voted against. The independent director chairing the meeting used a casting vote, and the resolution was declared passed. Three days later the shareholder issued a statement worth reading slowly. Its company's Articles of Association, it said, require the affirmative support of a majority of its nominee directors, and a head count cannot substitute for that. "Whether the result of the vote was 4:1, or any other figure, is irrelevant," it said, as reported by The Hindu. "A condition is either met, or it is not."

Who is right is a question for the board, the tribunal and possibly the courts, and an essay is not the place to decide it. What is worth our attention is the shape of the argument. Each side claims to be obeying the rules. The quarrel is over what the rules say at the precise moment when one reading helps one side and hurts the other. That moment is where institutions are actually tested, because a rule that binds only when it is convenient is not a rule at all. It is a preference printed on letterhead.

Consider why rules exist in the first place. Strangers cannot trust each other's intentions, so they trust an arrangement instead: a set of commitments fixed before anyone knows who will benefit from them. A shareholder invests, a candidate prepares for years, a citizen registers to vote, each on the assumption that the terms will not be rewritten once the result is known. The value of a rule therefore lies almost entirely in its predictability. If it is honoured when it suits the powerful and reinterpreted when it does not, it tells nobody anything about tomorrow, and the trust it was meant to carry drains away.

The shareholder's second argument makes this point more sharply. The same voting protections, it said, had been challenged during the dispute over the removal of a former chairman, when the appellate tribunal found them oppressive; the company had defended them all the way to the Supreme Court and won. "The Company cannot now disown the protection it went to the Supreme Court to preserve," the statement said. Whatever its merit in law, the moral intuition behind it is universal. We distrust anyone who calls a rule sacred when it protects them and a technicality when it restrains them. Consistency across time is what turns a clause into a commitment.

Nowhere is this intuition stronger than in examinations. An economist writing in The Indian Express this week observed that the examination system offers families one basic assurance: whatever the inequalities before the paper, the rules governing selection will at least be fair. He suggested that paper-leak protests may be turning that assurance into a genuine electoral question, where decades of evidence on poor school learning never did. The reason is instructive. A broken school toilet is a failure of provision. A leaked paper is a betrayal of a rule, and of the one rule that asked everyone, rich and poor, to submit to the same test on the same day. People forgive a state that cannot do everything. They do not forgive one that quietly makes exceptions to its own promise.

Yet a rule applied without exception is not automatically a rule applied well. In Delhi, the Election Commission's special intensive revision of electoral rolls has generated notices for 33.1 lakh electors. The list includes a Chief Minister, a Union Minister, a former Deputy Prime Minister and, flagged for a "self-name mismatch" by the Commission's own software, a sitting Election Commissioner. The procedure, reassuringly, did not pause for rank. But the same draft roll also lists as a 70-year-old elector an economist who died in November 2024, and flags him for “no mapping”. A rule that spares no one earns respect; a rule that cannot tell the living from the dead loses it. Inconvenience proves integrity only when the rule is also accurate.

There is an honest objection to all this, and it should be stated in full. Rigid rules can be cruel. Law is general and life is particular, and every tradition of governance recognises that the letter can defeat the purpose it was written to serve. An administrator who follows a procedure mechanically while a flood rises is not admirable. Dr B.R. Ambedkar put the deeper point in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949: “however good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot.” Rules, in other words, are only as good as the character of those who operate them, and character sometimes requires judgment rather than obedience.

The objection is right, but it points to a distinction rather than a licence. There is a difference between changing a rule and bending it. Change is open, general and prospective: a company may amend its articles by special resolution, Parliament may amend a statute, an examining body may redesign its process, and everyone knows the new terms before the next game begins. Bending is private, particular and retrospective: the rule is read differently in this case, for this person, after the result is known. The first is how institutions adapt. The second is how they decay, and the decay is rarely announced. Institutions are seldom destroyed by open defiance. They are hollowed out by creative interpretation on the day it matters.

This is why the demand placed on public servants is so specific. Following a roster needs no courage when no one important is watching. The test arrives with the telephone call: the transfer that should be made out of turn, the tender that could be slightly re-read, the candidate whose file could move a little faster. On that day the rule costs something, and the officer who honours it is not being rigid. She is converting a sentence in a manual into a fact about the world, so that the next citizen who reads that sentence can believe it.

It follows that the authority of a rule is not conferred by the body that writes it. It is accumulated, one inconvenient day at a time, by the people who keep it when breaking it would have been easier and invisible. Every such day adds a little to a stock of trust that no statement, however eloquent, can replace; every exception withdraws from it faster than it was deposited. The boardroom, the examination hall and the electoral roll are very different places, but they ask the same question. Did the rule hold when someone powerful needed it not to? If the answer is yes, the rule is worth something. If the answer is no, it was only ever a suggestion.

Built from today's cards: Tata Trusts calls Chandrasekaran's reappointment 'void ab initio', challenges casting-vote use · Paper-leak protests may be turning examination fairness into a genuine electoral issue, argues economist · EC issues Delhi SIR notices to CM, EC Sandhu, Advani, Jaishankar over roll discrepancies

ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read

Dependence is not the danger; not knowing where it lies is.

Themes: Economy · Strategic autonomy · Science & technology

A wheat farmer in Punjab who buys a bag of di-ammonium phosphate this rabi season has almost certainly never thought about sulphur. He has no reason to. Yet without it there would be no bag. Rock phosphate cannot feed a plant until it is broken down with sulphuric acid, and most of the world's sulphur is not mined at all: according to industry figures reported this week, only about a tenth is, while the rest is recovered from oil refining and gas processing. When Ukrainian drones struck Russian refineries, and when strikes hit Gulf energy infrastructure, the landed price of sulphur in India climbed to about $1,070 a tonne, from under $200 not long ago. The farmer's harvest turned out to depend on the refinery schedules of countries he will never visit.

It is tempting to read such stories as an argument for autarky: make everything at home and fear nothing. That conclusion is wrong, and it is worth saying why at the start. No economy of any size has ever been self-sufficient in everything, and none that tried grew rich. Adam Smith put the everyday logic plainly in The Wealth of Nations: "It is the maxim of every prudent master of a family, never to attempt to make at home what it will cost him more to make than to buy." Dependence is simply the other face of specialisation, and specialisation is where prosperity comes from. The real danger lies elsewhere. It lies in dependence that nobody has mapped, that nobody chose, and that nobody can reverse when it is used against them.

Consider what India has learned this week about its own manufacturing. Bilateral trade with China reached $167.6 billion in 2025, but imports from China rose by about 71 per cent between 2021 and 2025, from $87.5 billion to $149.5 billion, while exports stayed broadly flat. Nearly 70 per cent of those imports are intermediate goods and another 22 per cent capital goods. India has become a major hub for assembling mobile phones, and yet the share of imported parts and components in its import basket from China rose from 3.3 per cent in 2022 to 10.1 per cent in 2025. Researchers writing in The Hindu call this the "assembly trap" of self-reliance: the more successfully we assemble, the more deeply we may depend on someone else's components. The headline of success and the fact of dependence are the same statistic, read from two ends.

The magnet story is stranger still, because it is a story of dependence that cannot even be seen. The Annual Survey of Industries puts India's domestic permanent-magnet market at around ₹750 crore, while trade data show imports several times that entire market. Nobody can yet say confidently where those magnets enter the economy or how they travel through it. The value chain runs from exploration and mining through separation, oxides, metals, alloys and finally finished magnets, and each stage demands different science and different industry. As the authors argue, a country may secure the mineral in the ground and still remain dependent if it cannot process it. A nation that does not know which stage it is weak at cannot choose where to invest, and a nation that cannot measure its dependence cannot manage it.

Some dependence, moreover, is not commercial at all. Documents from a global investigation reported this week show that during the 73-day Doklam standoff of 2017, the only Indian branch of a Chinese state-owned bank suspended eleven approved loans and bond investments totalling $185 million, and organised its Party members to stay in constant touch with their embassy and consulate. The sums are small by the standards of the Indian economy. The lesson is not. Capital that looks like ordinary finance on a calm day can behave like an instrument of state on a tense one. Adam Smith, the patron saint of free exchange, saw this too; defending Britain's navigation laws, he wrote in the same book that "defence, however, is of much more importance than opulence."

What, then, does wise dependence look like? The first requirement is visibility. Before a state can reduce a vulnerability, it must locate it, and that is a task for statistics as much as for strategy. The integrated mapping of value chains proposed for magnets, stage by stage, is not a bureaucratic luxury; it is the precondition of every other decision. The second is diversity.

India's phosphate makers have secured rock phosphate through joint ventures and tie-ups in Jordan, Senegal and Morocco. That is prudent, but this week shows its limit: diversifying one input is of little use if a second, sulphur, remains exposed to the same shocks.

The third requirement is patience, and here India has its own best example. In the 1950s Homi Bhabha conceived a three-stage nuclear programme precisely because the country had modest uranium and very large thorium resources. The plan was to use natural-uranium reactors first, then fast breeders, and finally thorium, turning a resource disadvantage into a long-term design. Seventy years on, a former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission is urging that thorium-based fuel be introduced early into India's indigenous pressurised heavy water reactors, and the eighth unit at Rawatbhata, the fourth of sixteen indigenous 700 MWe reactors, has begun loading fuel. Whatever one thinks of the pace, this is what chosen dependence looks like: importing what one must while steadily building the capability that will eventually make the import optional.

The strongest counter-argument deserves a fair hearing. Protection has a poor record in India. The licence years produced high-cost industry, scarce goods and firms that lobbied rather than innovated. Imports of sophisticated inputs and machinery can be the fastest route to upgrading, and a blanket shutter against them would punish exactly the manufacturers India is trying to grow. The authors of the assembly-trap study concede this; they argue not for bans but for calibrated tariffs on parts and components, designed to nurture chosen segments of the value chain. The distinction matters. Self-reliance as a slogan tends to become protection; self-reliance as a method becomes capability.

There is a quieter, human version of the same truth. An individual who depends on others is not weak; everyone does. The weakness lies in not knowing which dependence would break us, and having no plan for the day it is withdrawn. Nations are not so different. Interdependence has made the world richer, but it has also made it possible to turn fertiliser inputs, rare-earth magnets and bank credit into levers of pressure.

The task before India is therefore neither to depend on nobody nor to depend without thought. It is to know, precisely and in numbers, where it depends; to keep more than one door open at every critical chokepoint; and to build, patiently and over decades, the capability that turns an unavoidable dependence into a deliberate choice. The farmer buying his bag of fertiliser does not need to know about sulphur. The state that serves him cannot afford not to.

Built from today's cards: India's 'assembly trap': electronics import intensity from China rose to 10.1% despite Atmanirbhar push · Sulphur import prices triple in a year, squeezing India's DAP and SSP fertiliser output · India's critical minerals strategy has no framework to track where permanent-magnet capability is built · Leaked ICBC files show Chinese bank froze $185mn in loans and mobilised Party cadre in Mumbai during 2017 Doklam standoff · Ex-AEC chief Kakodkar calls for early thorium-HALEU fuel shift in PHWRs as RAPP-8 begins fuel loading