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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Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge.

Quote of the Day

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

— Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)

The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 22 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 · 22 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.

> *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

Every story in today's polity section asks who has to prove what. The Supreme Court tells the police that they, not the arrested person, must show that the grounds of arrest were given, and that a second arrest needs a magistrate's permission. The Hindu argues that the Election Commission has made voters prove they belong on the roll after it had already struck them off. The Court strikes down methanol rules because Maharashtra could not show they worked, and the Karnataka High Court makes a Public Service Commission answer for its own recruitment. Even the Ladakh proposal comes down to proof, since a new Article 371K will be judged by the powers written into it, not by its name.

1.1 Supreme Court Holds Arrest Without Written Grounds Unconstitutional, Makes Magistrate's Sanction Mandatory for Any Re-arrest

THE NEWS New Delhi. On Monday, September 21, a Bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Atul S. Chandurkar ruled that an arrested person who was not told the grounds of arrest, or was denied a lawyer, is entitled to immediate release. Grounds of arrest are the facts and reasons for which the police take a person into custody. The Hindu reports the Bench as holding that the right to be told these grounds in writing, in a language the person understands, and to consult a lawyer of one's choice is a "sacrosanct" fundamental right under Article 22(1) that "cannot be breached under any situation". "Any breach or non-compliance would entail immediate release of the arrested person because such arrest is unconstitutional. We cannot tinker with the most important safeguards provided under Article 22," Justice Bhuyan wrote. The right applies to every offence, under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita or special laws on terrorism and money laundering, and agencies cannot treat a breach as a "mere procedural lapse". Release in such a case is not bail. It is release from unconstitutional detention, and a later chargesheet or a magistrate taking cognisance does not make the arrest valid. The Bench refused "blanket immunity" from a second arrest, since some cases involve grave offences, but The Indian Express reports that the 69-page ruling sets strict conditions. The police must first give written grounds and then apply to the magistrate, explaining why re-arrest is needed and why grounds were not given the first time. The application must be endorsed by the officer's immediate superior, who must hand the investigation to another officer and order a departmental inquiry, and an adverse finding goes into the service book. The magistrate must decide within a week, and may allow re-arrest only if satisfied that there were bona fide reasons. High Courts were directed to award "suitable mandatory compensation" for arrests that violate these safeguards. The case was an appeal by an accused in a POCSO case in Punjab, whom a magistrate released and then allowed to be re-arrested, a decision the Punjab and Haryana High Court upheld on May 29. The Express places the ruling in a line of cases that began with Pankaj Bansal (October 2023) and ended with Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra (November 2025). The syllabus link is fundamental rights and criminal justice reform.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 22(1) guarantees grounds of arrest and counsel but is applied loosely for decades → Pankaj Bansal (2023) demands written grounds under PMLA, Ram Kishor Arora dilutes it → Prabir Purkayastha (2024) and Mihir Rajesh Shah (2025) extend written grounds to all statutes → agencies re-arrest people freed on this ground, as in a Punjab POCSO case → Supreme Court on September 21 requires magistrate sanction, supervisory endorsement and compensation

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Article 22 is the Constitution's own code of arrest —** Article 22(1) provides that no person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest, nor be denied the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. Article 22(2) requires that every arrested person be produced before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours, excluding the time needed for the journey, and not be held longer without the magistrate's authority. Article 22(3) removes these two protections for an enemy alien and for a person held under a law of preventive detention, and clauses (4) to (7) set out the separate safeguards for preventive detention, such as review by an Advisory Board. The Article protects citizens and non-citizens alike. 2. **The statute repeats the duty, but the Constitution sets the floor —** Section 47 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, which replaced Section 50 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, requires a police officer arresting without warrant to tell the person the full particulars of the offence or other grounds of arrest. Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 and Section 43B of the Unlawful Activities

	(Prevention) Act, 1967 contain similar duties for the ED and for terror investigations. The Court's point is that these sections carry out Article 22(1) and do not limit it, so no special law can make the duty weaker. This is why a single ruling now covers ordinary crimes, money laundering and terrorism. 3. **Earlier landmark cases treated arrest as a power to be justified —** In Joginder Kumar v. State of U.P. (1994), the Supreme Court held that the power to arrest does not justify its use in every case and that the police must be able to justify it. D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997) laid down guidelines such as an arrest memo, informing a relative and a medical examination. Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014) discouraged routine arrest for offences punishable with up to seven years. Monday's judgment adds a consequence to the procedure: an unlawful arrest now means release, a change of investigating officer and a mark on the officer's record. 4. **Compensation for violation of liberty is a public-law remedy —** In Rudul Sah v. State of Bihar (1983), the Supreme Court awarded compensation to a man kept in jail for years after his acquittal, and in Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa (1993) it held that compensation for violation of Article 21 is a remedy in public law, separate from a civil suit for damages. The direction to High Courts to award "mandatory compensation" builds on this line. Under Article 359, as amended by the 44th Amendment, 1978, the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended even during an Emergency. Article 22 does not have this protection.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS2 lists fundamental rights and the working of the judiciary —** Questions on personal liberty come up often in GS2, most commonly on how Article 21 grew after Maneka Gandhi and on the tension between security laws and liberty. This ruling gives an answer on PMLA or UAPA a precise doctrinal anchor: the constitutional safeguard does not depend on the statute. It also fits questions on police reform and custodial accountability. 2. **Prelims tests the clauses of Article 22 and the Emergency exceptions —** The examiner likes to ask which rights survive an Emergency, whether the 24-hour rule applies to preventive detention, and whether Article 22 is available to foreigners. The trap is to mix up the rights of an arrested person under clauses (1) and (2) with the preventive detention safeguards in clauses (4) to (7). 3. **Criminal law reform is a live GS2 and Essay theme —** The BNS, BNSS and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam came into force on July 1, 2024. A candidate who can show how a constitutional ruling governs the new codes, instead of repeating the IPC-CrPC section numbers, shows current and exact knowledge.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 22(1) of the Constitution provides that an arrested person shall be informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds of arrest and shall not be denied the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. • Article 22(2) requires production of an arrested person before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, excluding the time necessary for the journey. • Under Article 22(3), the protections of clauses (1) and (2) do not apply to an enemy alien or to a person arrested or detained under a law providing for preventive detention. • Under Article 359 as amended by the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978, the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended during a proclamation of Emergency. • Section 47 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 requires a police officer arresting a person without warrant to communicate the full particulars of

	the offence or other grounds of arrest. ● In Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa (1993), the Supreme Court held that monetary compensation for violation of fundamental rights is a remedy available in public law. ● The rights under Article 22(1) and (2) are available to non-citizens as well as citizens.
ANALYSIS	1. **The ruling moves the cost of illegality from the accused to the agency —** Earlier, the remedy for an unlawful arrest was release, and agencies often answered it with an immediate re-arrest, so liberty lasted only as long as the walk out of the court. By requiring a superior officer's endorsement, a new investigating officer, a departmental inquiry and a service-book entry, the Court makes the officer and the department pay for the breach, not the prosecution. This is a sanction on institutions, and it is likelier to change police practice than a declaration of rights alone. The counter-view is that it may slow urgent cases, but the magistrate must decide within a week, which is a short delay against the cost of an unconstitutional detention. 2. **Saying "this is not bail" changes how courts will treat the offence —** Stringent laws such as the PMLA and UAPA make bail extremely hard to get, through twin conditions and presumptions. If release for breach of Article 22(1) were bail, those conditions would apply and the constitutional right would lose its force exactly where it matters most. By calling it release from unconstitutional detention, the Court places the remedy outside the statutory bail framework. That is why the Punjab government's argument about serious allegations failed: the gravity of the offence decides whether bail is given, not whether the Constitution was followed. 3. **The Court has chosen judicial filtering over a blanket bar, and that is defensible —** A total bar on re-arrest would have let people accused of serious crimes such as the POCSO offence in this case go free because of an officer's mistake, and would have given the victim nothing. A free hand to re-arrest would have made Article 22(1) meaningless. Requiring prior judicial sanction is the usual constitutional answer to this dilemma, similar to a warrant, and it keeps the decision away from "the very same authority who had violated" the right, in the Bench's words. The real test will be whether magistrates, already overloaded, examine these applications carefully or pass them routinely. 4. **Six years of back-and-forth shows why rulings on rights need to state their consequences —** The Express's account of the case law, from Pankaj Bansal to Ram Kishor Arora's dilution, then Prabir Purkayastha and Mihir Rajesh Shah, shows how a right can be accepted in principle and still ignored in practice. Each earlier ruling said what the police must do but left open what follows if they do not. Monday's judgment fills that gap, and the order to award compensation gives High Courts a reason to act. Rights in criminal procedure work only when a breach costs the state something it wants to avoid. 5. **Language and literacy are the untested part of the ruling —** The requirement that grounds be given in writing in a language the arrested person understands matters most for poor and less literate people, who are the majority of undertrials. A written paper in English handed to a migrant labourer meets the form of the rule and defeats its purpose. District police will need translated templates and legal-aid lawyers present at the police station if the right is to be real. Otherwise the ruling will mainly protect those who already have lawyers, which is the pattern Indian criminal justice already suffers from.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Procedural safeguards are not formalities; they are the substance of liberty." In the light of the Supreme Court's recent judgment on grounds of arrest and re-arrest, examine the

	scope of Article 22(1) of the Constitution. How far do such rulings strengthen accountability in policing, and what administrative reforms are needed to give them effect? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the September 21 ruling: an arrest without written grounds is unconstitutional, release is not bail, and any re-arrest needs a magistrate's prior sanction. Quote Article 22(1) in one line. 2. **Body — the constitutional scope —** Explain clauses (1) and (2), the exceptions in clause (3), and the fact that the right applies to all persons and all statutes. Trace the case law in two sentences: Joginder Kumar and D.K. Basu, then Pankaj Bansal, Prabir Purkayastha and Mihir Rajesh Shah. 3. **Body — accountability mechanisms —** Show how the new directions shift the cost to the agency: endorsement by a superior, change of investigating officer, departmental inquiry, service-book entry, a one-week deadline for the magistrate, and mandatory compensation in the line of Rudul Sah and Nilabati Behera. Give the counter-argument that police in grave cases may face delay, and answer it. 4. **Body — administrative reforms —** Suggest standard multilingual arrest-grounds forms under the BNSS, legal-aid lawyers at police stations, CCTV and digital arrest memos, training modules for magistrates on re-arrest applications, and implementation of Prakash Singh directions separating investigation from law and order. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that liberty is protected less by declarations than by consequences, and that the judgment will work only if police stations and magistrates' courts are equipped to follow it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Superintendent of Police, you learn that a magistrate has released an accused in a sexual offence case because the investigating officer did not give written grounds of arrest. The victim's family is angry. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would tell the family plainly that the release was due to our lapse and not a finding on the case, and assure them of protection and of a fresh legal route. I would assign the case to another officer, order a departmental inquiry into the lapse and endorse a reasoned application for re-arrest to the magistrate, as the Supreme Court now requires. At the district level, I would issue a standing order with a bilingual written-grounds format and check compliance at every police station. Correcting the system protects future victims as much as future accused. **Q2. An interview board asks: does judicial insistence on procedure help criminals escape?** ***Approach:*** Procedure protects everyone, including the innocent person who is wrongly picked up, and most people arrested in India are poor and without lawyers. The Court has not barred re-arrest in serious cases; it has required a magistrate to check it, which is a small burden. Where criminals do escape, the cause is usually weak investigation, not respect for rights. A police force that routinely follows procedure also produces cases that hold up at trial. **Q3. You are a Chief Judicial Magistrate. The police file a re-arrest application saying only that the offence is grave. How will you deal with it?** ***Approach:*** The judgment requires bona fide reasons for why grounds were not given the first time, not merely a statement that the offence is serious. I would ask for the superior officer's endorsement, confirmation that the case has been handed to another officer and written grounds already served on the accused. I would hear the accused briefly, decide within the one-week limit and record reasons either way. A mechanical approval would defeat the purpose of the safeguard the Court has placed in my hands.

1.2 Centre Proposes Article 371K Giving Ladakh a Directly Elected Body With Legislative and Financial Powers

THE NEWS New Delhi / Leh. The Indian Express reports that the Centre has proposed inserting a new provision, Article 371K, in the Constitution to provide special constitutional safeguards for Ladakh, a Union Territory without a legislature. The proposal follows an "in-principle understanding" between the Ministry of Home Affairs and representatives of the Apex Body, Leh (ABL) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which speak for Leh and Kargil districts. The understanding is to create a directly elected Union Territory-level body with legislative, executive, budgetary, planning and financial powers. According to the MHA, the body would have legislative powers over land, culture and language, forests, environment and natural resources, as well as other subjects reserved for the UT under Article 240, which lets the President make regulations for certain Union Territories. The paper's explainer notes that Ladakh's leaders also want control over law and order. That is the reverse of Article 371H, under which the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh has special responsibility for law and order. The land protection Ladakh seeks resembles Articles 371A (Nagaland) and 371G (Mizoram), under which certain laws of Parliament on land and customary practice do not apply unless the State Assembly agrees. The original Article 371 of 1950 put the governments of the Part B States, the former princely states, under the general control of the President for ten years. The Seventh Amendment and States Reorganisation Act of 1956 abolished that classification, and Parliament replaced the Article with one for Maharashtra and Gujarat, especially for Vidarbha, Marathwada, Saurashtra and Kutch. Later clauses were added: 371A for Nagaland after the 16-Point Agreement of 1960, 371B for Assam (22nd Amendment, 1969), 371C for Manipur's hill areas, 371D for Andhra Pradesh after the Six-Point Formula of 1973, 371F for Sikkim in 1975, 371G for Mizoram after the 1986 Mizo Peace Accord, 371H for Arunachal Pradesh, 371I for Goa and 371J (2012) for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. The paper argues that 371K's strength will depend on its text. If it only creates an elected body and lists subjects, it may disappoint, as Manipur's hill tribes say 371C has. If it gives the body control over land, resources, recruitment and administration, and puts law and order and the bureaucracy under the elected executive, Ladakh's head of government would be more powerful than the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The syllabus link is federalism and special provisions for regions.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 makes Ladakh a UT without a legislature → hill councils in Leh and Kargil lose influence and fear for land, jobs and culture → ABL and KDA negotiate with the MHA for constitutional safeguards → Centre reaches an in-principle understanding on an elected UT-level body → proposal to insert Article 371K, whose content will decide how much autonomy Ladakh gets

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Article 371 is a family of tailored arrangements, not a single status —** Part XXI of the Constitution, titled "Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions", contains Articles 371 to 371J. Article 371(2) lets the President give the Governor of Maharashtra or Gujarat a special responsibility for separate development boards. Articles 371A and 371G say that no Act of Parliament on religious or social practices, customary law, administration of civil and criminal justice by customary law, or ownership and transfer of land applies to Nagaland or Mizoram unless the State Assembly decides so by resolution. Article 371D provides for equitable opportunities in public employment and education in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and Article 371J does the same for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region through a development board and local reservation.

2. **Union Territories are governed by the President, with legislatures only where Parliament creates them —** Under Article 239, every Union Territory is administered by the President acting through an administrator. Article 239A lets Parliament create a legislature and council of ministers for Puducherry, and the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 applied it to the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. Article 239AA, inserted by the 69th Amendment, 1991, gives Delhi a Legislative Assembly with police, public order and land kept outside its power. Article 240 allows the President to make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of certain UTs, and such regulations have the force of an Act of Parliament.

3. **The Sixth Schedule is the other model of tribal autonomy —** Under Articles 244(2) and 275(1), the Sixth Schedule governs tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram through Autonomous District Councils. Each council has up to 30 members,

	of whom not more than four are nominated by the Governor and the rest are elected. The councils can make laws on land, forests, inheritance, marriage and social customs, run village courts and collect some taxes. The Sixth Schedule creates councils within a State, whereas 371K would place a single elected body over a whole Union Territory, which is why the IE explainer calls Ladakh's case one that "does not neatly fit" any existing model. 4. **Inserting 371K needs a special majority but not State ratification —** An amendment under Article 368(2) must be passed in each House of Parliament by a majority of total membership and two-thirds of members present and voting. Ratification by half the State legislatures is needed only for matters in the proviso, such as the election of the President, the Seventh Schedule lists, representation of States in Parliament and Article 368 itself. Article 371 and its sub-articles are not in that list, which is why Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram received their provisions by ordinary special-majority amendments such as the 13th (1962), 36th (1975) and 53rd (1986).
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Special provisions and asymmetric federalism are repeat GS2 themes —** The syllabus asks for the functions and responsibilities of the Union and States and issues relating to the federal structure. UPSC has asked about special provisions for some States, the Sixth Schedule, and the constitutional position of Union Territories. The 2019 reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir made the UT questions current again. 2. **Prelims loves the matching of Articles to States —** A typical question asks which Article covers which State or which amendment inserted it, often with close decoys such as 371A and 371G, or 371C and 371H. Learn the pattern by type: customary law and land (371A, 371G), hill-area committees (371B, 371C), regional equity (371, 371D, 371J), integration (371F), and Governor's special role (371H).
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 371A, inserted by the 13th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1962, provides that Acts of Parliament on Naga religious or social practices, customary law and ownership and transfer of land do not apply to Nagaland unless the State Assembly so decides by resolution. • Article 371G, inserted by the 53rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1986, gives Mizoram protections for religious and social practices, customary law and land similar to those of Nagaland. • Article 371H gives the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh special responsibility with respect to law and order in the State. • Article 371F was inserted by the 36th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1975, when Sikkim became a State of the Indian Union. • The original Article 371 placed the governments of Part B States under the general control of the President and was replaced after the Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act, 1956. • Under Article 240, the President may make regulations for the peace, progress and good government of specified Union Territories, and such regulations may repeal or amend an Act of Parliament applicable to that territory. • Articles 371 to 371J fall in Part XXI of the Constitution, which deals with temporary, transitional and special provisions.
ANALYSIS	1. **The 371 route is the Centre's way of saying yes to autonomy and no to statehood —** An elected body with legislative and financial powers answers the core complaint since 2019, that Ladakh lost its voice when it became a UT without a legislature. But placing it under Article 371 keeps Ladakh a Union Territory, with the Centre in ultimate charge of a sensitive border region facing both China and Pakistan. That is a political

	compromise, and the key question is whether it is a stepping stone or a substitute. The ABL and KDA may accept it as a first step, but a body that the Lieutenant Governor can override will be seen as the old hill councils under a new name. 2. **Law and order is where the negotiation will really be decided —** The Express rightly notes that Ladakh wants the opposite of 371H, which puts law and order with the Governor. No UT legislature, not even Delhi's, controls police, and giving it to Ladakh would create a UT more powerful than a State-level legislature elsewhere. The Centre's security worry is real: Ladakh is a front-line region, and policing overlaps with border management. A workable middle path would give the elected body a say in local policing and recruitment while keeping the border forces and intelligence with the Centre. 3. **Land protection matters more than legislative lists —** The fear driving Ladakh's movement is that opening the region to outside land purchase, mining and large tourism will change its demography and fragile ecology. A 371A-style clause, under which Parliament's land laws do not apply unless the local body agrees, would address this directly and would be difficult for later governments to dilute. A list of legislative subjects, on the other hand, can be overridden by Parliament since a UT has no protected sphere. The drafting of the land clause will decide whether 371K is more like Nagaland's protection or Manipur's disappointment. 4. **Accommodating Leh and Kargil together is itself an achievement —** Leh and Kargil have different religious majorities and did not always want the same thing: Leh had long sought UT status, while Kargil was wary of separation from Kashmir. The fact that the ABL and KDA negotiated jointly and reached a common understanding shows that regional identity can bridge religious difference when institutions give it a single forum. A single elected UT-level body will have to share resources fairly between the two districts, and a rotation or balanced allocation formula may be needed. Failure there would recreate within Ladakh the grievance Ladakh had within Jammu and Kashmir. 5. **The counter-view: more special provisions weaken a uniform constitutional order —** Critics argue that every new 371 clause adds to a patchwork in which rules on land and jobs differ by region, and that the removal of Article 370 was justified as ending such exceptions. The answer is that Article 371 and Article 370 are different in kind: 371 clauses operate within full constitutional integration and are amendable by Parliament. The Constitution has always used asymmetry to hold diverse regions together, and the Northeast shows that tailored provisions reduced conflict. Uniformity is not the same as unity.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Article 371 shows that the Indian Constitution treats asymmetry as a tool of integration, not a threat to it." Discuss with reference to existing special provisions and the proposed Article 371K for Ladakh. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the proposal: an in-principle understanding between the MHA and the ABL and KDA on a directly elected UT-level body for Ladakh with legislative, executive and financial powers, to be protected by a new Article 371K. 2. **Body — the evolution of Article 371 —** Trace it from a transitional control over Part B States in 1950 to the post-1956 provision for Maharashtra and Gujarat, and then to 371A to 371J. Group them by purpose: customary law and land, hill-area committees, regional equity, integration and the Governor's special role, with one example each. 3. **Body — how 371K differs —** Explain that it would be the first such provision for a UT without a legislature, sitting alongside Articles 239 and 240. Compare it with the Sixth Schedule and with 371A and 371G on land, and with 371H on law and order, which Ladakh wants reversed.

	4. **Body — concerns and safeguards —** Discuss security in a border region, the risk of an empty list of subjects (the Manipur 371C experience), balance between Leh and Kargil, and ecological protection. Suggest a firm land clause, fiscal devolution with a predictable grant, and clear division of police functions. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that asymmetric arrangements have kept India together by accommodating difference, and that 371K will succeed if the powers it writes in are real and protected.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Chief Secretary-equivalent in Ladakh's administration. An elected body is about to be created under 371K. What would you prepare first?** ***Approach:*** I would first map every department and function against the subjects likely to be transferred, so that staff, budgets and files can move on day one without confusion. I would prepare a transparent land record and a register of forest and common lands, since land will be the most contested subject. I would also draft business rules on the relationship between the elected executive and the Lieutenant Governor, so that disputes are settled by procedure rather than public conflict. A smooth handover builds trust in the new arrangement faster than any speech. **Q2. An interview board asks: should law and order be transferred to an elected body in a border UT?** ***Approach:*** Local policing, such as traffic, crime against women and community policing, can safely be accountable to elected representatives, and that accountability improves trust. Border security, counter-intelligence and the Central Armed Police Forces must stay with the Union, because they concern national defence. A split along these lines, with a joint coordination committee, is more practical than an all-or-nothing transfer. Delhi's experience shows that unclear division of police powers produces constant friction. **Q3. As Deputy Commissioner of Kargil, you hear fears that the new body will be dominated by Leh. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would take the concern seriously, because perceived domination is exactly the grievance that fuelled Ladakh's own movement. I would ensure Kargil's demands are documented and sent to the MHA through proper channels before the text is finalised, including on seat distribution and allocation of development funds. I would hold open meetings to explain what is known and correct rumours. Fair process at the drafting stage prevents mistrust once the body begins to function.

1.3 Hindu Editorial: 93% of Decided West Bengal SIR Appeals Restored Wrongly Deleted Electors

THE NEWS New Delhi / Kolkata. In an editorial titled "Presumed ineligible", The Hindu argues that the Election Commission of India (ECI) must end its method of "deleting first and verifying later" in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. An SIR is a fresh, house-to-house preparation of the voter list in which electors must submit enumeration forms and, where asked, documents. Citing an ECI counter-affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the paper says that by early September 2026, of more than 38 lakh appeals filed before the SIR appellate tribunals in West Bengal, just over 1,22,000 had been disposed of, a disposal rate of 3.2%. Of these, 1,13,943 electors were added back to the rolls, an inclusion rate of nearly 93%. In the earlier claims and objections phase, judicial officers deployed for verification had deemed 27 lakh of the 60 lakh electors flagged for "logical discrepancies" to be ineligible, and more than 22 lakh of them have appealed. The editorial does not reconcile the 38 lakh and 22 lakh figures. If these rates hold, the paper argues, most of the 27 lakh should never have been declared ineligible, and "massive disenfranchisement preceded the West Bengal Assembly polls"; with municipal elections approaching, the ECI must speed up appeals. In Delhi's Phase 3 SIR, The Hindu's analysis found that in 24 of 70 constituencies the draft roll records fewer electors than those who voted in the February 2025 Assembly election. "Mapping", the process of linking every elector to rolls from the early 2000s, has put 13.79 lakh Delhi electors under notice, and a further 19.33 lakh are flagged for "logical discrepancies" on undefined grounds. The paper says the burden of proving eligibility has been placed on the elector, and that the Court, which intervened sharply in the Bihar SIR, has since been permissive. Odisha's final roll, published on Monday, has 3,16,32,754 voters, 17,66,837 fewer than the 3,33,99,591 on July 17, according to Chief Electoral Officer R.S. Gopalan. Draft exclusions included 8,32,544 dead, 8,08,205 shifted and 1,58,118 duplicates. In Nagaland, Additional CEO Awa Lorin said 9.33% of electors could not be mapped to the 2005 roll and 27.31% showed mapping anomalies, together 36.64%, and nearly five lakh voters are expected to receive notices, The Indian Express reports. The syllabus link is electoral reform and the right to vote.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

ECI orders a Special Intensive Revision requiring fresh enumeration and linkage to rolls of the early 2000s → mapping gaps and "logical discrepancies" flag lakhs of electors → verification officers declare many ineligible before appeals are heard → appellate tribunals in West Bengal restore about 93% of the cases they decide, but decide only 3.2% → The Hindu calls for the ECI to verify before deleting, as the Supreme Court hears Delhi and Bengal petitions

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The Constitution makes the franchise universal and the roll the ECI's duty —** 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 for one general electoral roll for every constituency and bars exclusion on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them. Article 326 provides that elections shall be on the basis of adult suffrage, and every citizen aged 18 or above who is not otherwise disqualified is entitled to be registered. The voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 by the 61st Amendment, 1988. 2. **The Representation of the People Act, 1950 governs who is on the roll —** Section 16 of the RP Act, 1950 disqualifies a person from registration if he is not a citizen, is declared of unsound mind by a competent court, or is disqualified under a law on corrupt practices. Section 19 requires that the person be 18 on the qualifying date and ordinarily resident in the constituency, and Section 20 explains ordinary residence. Section 21 provides for the preparation and revision of rolls, and Section 21(3) allows the ECI to direct a special revision at any time for reasons to be recorded. Section 22 lets the Electoral Registration Officer correct or delete entries, but only after giving the person a reasonable opportunity of being heard, and Section 24 provides for appeals. 3. **Forms and qualifying dates are the machinery of everyday revision —** Under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, Form 6 is used for inclusion of a name, Form 7 for objection to or deletion of an entry, and Form 8 for correction or shifting. The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 amended Section 14 of the RP Act, 1950 to provide four qualifying dates in a year — January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 — so that young voters need not wait a full year. The Electoral Registration Officer, appointed under Section 13B, is usually a revenue officer, and the Booth Level Officer is the field functionary. 4. **Courts have long insisted on hearing before deletion —** In Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995), the Supreme Court held that a person whose name is on the roll cannot be removed on a mere suspicion of not being a citizen without notice and a fair inquiry, and that the entry itself carries weight. In Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner (1978), the Court described Article 324 as a reservoir of power, but one that must be exercised fairly and in line with law. These rulings are the reason the editorial's central complaint is about sequence: verification must come before deletion, not after.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Electoral reform is a standing GS2 topic —** The syllabus names the Representation of People's Act and the powers and functions of constitutional bodies. UPSC has asked about the independence of the ECI and about electoral reform, and the SIR exercise, with its huge numbers, gives a concrete case for questions on inclusion, administrative capacity and judicial oversight.

	2. **An editorial card trains the argument, not just the facts —** The Hindu's editorial offers a model of evidence-based criticism: it uses the ECI's own affidavit numbers. Mains answers that quote a disposal rate and an inclusion rate, and then draw an inference, score better than those that merely state that exclusion is bad.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, elections to Parliament and State Legislatures in the Election Commission. • Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in an electoral roll on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them. • Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 years. • Under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Election Commission may direct a special revision of the electoral roll at any time for reasons to be recorded. • Section 16 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 disqualifies a person from registration in an electoral roll if he is not a citizen of India. • The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 provided four qualifying dates in a year — January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 — for registration of electors. • Form 6 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 is used for inclusion of a name in the electoral roll and Form 7 for objection to inclusion or for deletion.
ANALYSIS	1. **A 93% reversal rate is an audit of the first decision, not proof of a fair system —** When nine out of ten appeals end in restoration, the appellate tribunal is not correcting occasional errors; it is revealing that the original decision process was unreliable. In any administrative system, a reversal rate that high would trigger a review of the first-level procedure. The ECI may argue that early decided cases are the easy ones and that the rate will fall as harder cases are heard. That is possible, but it only strengthens the case for pausing deletions until the reasons for so many errors are known. 2. **The disposal rate is the real disenfranchisement —** A right to appeal that is decided after the election is, for that election, no right at all. With only 3.2% of appeals disposed of, most wrongly removed voters in West Bengal could not vote in the Assembly polls, and many may miss the municipal polls too. Voting is a time-bound right: a restored name in December does not return a vote lost in the spring. The ECI therefore needs either many more tribunals or a rule that disputed names stay on the roll until the appeal is decided. 3. **Mapping to old rolls turns a paperwork gap into an eligibility question —** Linking each elector to the rolls of the early 2000s, as Delhi and Nagaland show, penalises the people who moved, married, migrated for work, or were missed in those years. That group is disproportionately poor, female and migrant, and in Nagaland, remote. The Nagaland figure of 36.64% unmapped or anomalous shows that the mismatch reflects the weakness of old records, not the ineligibility of voters. A mapping failure should prompt a field visit, not a notice asking the citizen to prove his existence. 4. **The counter-view: a clean roll also protects the vote —** Odisha's figures show that the SIR also removes real errors: over eight lakh dead electors and over one and a half lakh duplicates. Inflated rolls enable impersonation and weaken trust in results, and the ECI has a duty under Article 324 to fix them. The Hindu's argument is not against revision but against its sequence and burden. A roll can be cleaned of the dead and duplicates through field verification and death records without making every living elector prove

	eligibility. 5. **Judicial restraint has a cost when the right is time-bound —** The editorial criticises the Supreme Court for being permissive after its early interventions in Bihar. Courts usually avoid interfering in ongoing electoral processes, following the principle that elections should not be stalled. But when the process itself is the source of exclusion, delay by the Court operates as a decision in favour of exclusion. A narrow interim direction, such as no final deletion before a hearing, would respect the ECI's domain while protecting the franchise.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The right to vote is only as secure as the procedure for staying on the electoral roll." Critically examine the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in the light of recent data on appeals and deletions. Suggest safeguards that reconcile an accurate roll with universal adult franchise. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Cite the ECI affidavit data as reported by The Hindu: in West Bengal, of more than 38 lakh appeals just over 1.22 lakh were decided, and about 93% of those restored the elector. Frame the question as one of sequence and burden of proof. 2. **Body — constitutional and legal framework —** Explain Articles 324, 325 and 326, Sections 16, 19, 21 and 22 of the RP Act, 1950, and the need for a hearing before deletion, citing Lal Babu Hussein (1995). 3. **Body — the problem with delete-first —** Use Bengal's appellate data, Delhi's 24 constituencies with fewer electors than voters in 2025 and 33 lakh notices, and Nagaland's 36.64% mapping gap. Explain why migrants, women and remote tribal voters are most affected. 4. **Body — the case for revision and safeguards —** Acknowledge Odisha's removal of dead and duplicate entries. Suggest keeping disputed names on the roll till appeal, fixed time limits for tribunals, field verification by BLOs before notice, use of death registration data, publication of reasons for deletion, and an independent audit of reversal rates. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the goal of "no eligible elector left behind" must be reflected in the burden of proof itself, since it is the state, not the citizen, that has the records and the machinery.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are an Electoral Registration Officer. Your team has flagged 40,000 electors for "logical discrepancies", but you have two weeks. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would not delete anyone without a hearing, as Section 22 requires. I would sort the list by type of discrepancy, clear obvious clerical cases such as spelling variations in bulk after desk checks, and send BLOs for field visits to the rest. I would hold camp hearings in each ward on weekends and accept any reasonable document. If time runs short, I would seek an extension from the CEO rather than finalise a roll I cannot defend. **Q2. An interview board asks: is it fair to ask a citizen to prove he belongs on the roll?** ***Approach:*** A citizen can reasonably be asked to fill a form and show a common document, but the state holds birth, death and residence records and should use them first. Placing the full burden on the elector disadvantages those with weak paperwork, who are usually the poor. The fair approach is that the state shows a reason to doubt before the citizen must prove. The 93% restoration rate in Bengal suggests that reasons were often missing. **Q3. As Chief Electoral Officer, you see a 93% reversal rate at the appellate stage. What will you change?**

	Approach: I would treat it as a failure of the first stage and order a sample review of the decisions that were reversed to find the common errors. I would issue clear written criteria for "logical discrepancy", which the editorial says are undefined, and train officers on them. I would also add more appellate benches and publish weekly disposal data. Transparency about the errors would restore trust faster than a defence of the process.

1.4 Supreme Court Strikes Down Maharashtra Methanol Colourant Rules as Disproportionate, Issues Anti-Hooch Guidelines

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Hindu's explainer reports that on September 18, a Bench including Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran struck down Rules 18A and 18B of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972. Methanol, or methyl alcohol, is a highly toxic substance widely used as an industrial raw material for formaldehyde, paraformaldehyde, paints, resins and other chemicals; when mixed into illicit liquor it kills or blinds. Maharashtra introduced stricter controls after a 1991 hooch tragedy in Mumbai in which around 93 people died, following a committee headed by then Additional Director General of Police P.R. Parthasarthy. In 2011, it inserted Rules 18A and 18B. Rule 18A(1) required a seller to verify the buyer's Form A licence before selling methanol, Rule 18A(2) required methanol sold to non-drug manufacturers to be "denatured" — mixed with a colourant and a bitterant — and Rule 18B made possession without a Form A licence liable to confiscation. Manufacturers argued that colour would make products unacceptable to paint and pharmaceutical buyers and that additives could affect catalysts. The State argued that making methanol visible and bitter would stop its misuse in liquor. The Court accepted that the Poisons Act, 1919 lets States regulate the possession and sale of poisons, but held the rules violative of Articles 14 and 19(1)(g). Applying the proportionality test of K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), it found that preventing deaths was a legitimate aim but the rules were neither suitable nor necessary. Verifying a licence did not show how the buyer would use methanol, and the State failed to demonstrate that additives would prevent diversion. "The sub-rule even in the best case of full compliance cannot prevent the misuse it aims to prevent," the Court said, adding that it "addresses a mischief, it does not in fact remedy while imposing a continuous burden on the industries." Rule 18B, it held, could conflict with lawful possession under a Form B permit. The Court then issued guidelines: States should coordinate prohibition, excise, police, transport, industries and health departments with NGOs; check borders and illegal transport; identify places where illicit liquor is made; grant methanol licences only after verification and review them regularly; require industrial users to return excess methanol and keep stock records; and move methanol in dedicated, sealed tankers under excise supervision. It also sought more de-addiction centres. The syllabus link is fundamental rights, regulation and public health.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Methanol is cheap, industrial and lethal when mixed into illicit liquor → 1991 Mumbai hooch tragedy kills about 93 people → Maharashtra amends its Poisons Rules in 2011 to require licence checks and colourant-bitterant denaturing → manufacturers challenge the burden on legitimate industry → Supreme Court finds no proven link to preventing hooch, strikes the rules down on September 18 and issues supply-chain guidelines instead

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Proportionality is now the test for restrictions on fundamental rights —** In K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), the Supreme Court held that a restriction on a fundamental right must satisfy legality, a legitimate aim, and proportionality, meaning a rational link between the measure and the aim, and that the measure be necessary. The Court had earlier adopted a four-part proportionality test in Modern Dental College v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2016): legitimate goal, suitable means, no less restrictive alternative, and a proper balance between the benefit and the harm. The methanol ruling failed the rules at the suitability and necessity stages. The State must show evidence that its measure works, not merely that its aim is good. 2. **Article 14 forbids arbitrariness as well as unequal classification —** Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. Since E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu (1974) and Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978), the Court has held that arbitrariness is itself the opposite of equality. In Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017), it held that even legislation may be struck down for being

	manifestly arbitrary. Subordinate legislation such as the Maharashtra Poisons Rules is more open to such review, because it must also stay within its parent Act. 3. **Article 19(1)(g) protects business, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6) —** Article 19(1)(g) guarantees to citizens the right to practise any profession or carry on any occupation, trade or business. Article 19(6) allows the State to impose reasonable restrictions in the interests of the general public, and to prescribe professional qualifications or carry on a trade itself. A restriction is reasonable only if it has a proximate connection with its purpose and is not excessive. The Court found that denaturing methanol failed this "reasonable and proximate nexus" with the aim of stopping illicit liquor. 4. **Liquor and industrial alcohol sit in the State List, and Article 47 sets the policy goal —** Entry 8 of the State List covers intoxicating liquors, including their production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale, and Entry 51 covers excise on alcoholic liquors for human consumption. In State of U.P. v. Lalta Prasad Vaish (2024), a nine-judge Bench held by majority that "intoxicating liquor" includes industrial alcohol, overruling Synthetics and Chemicals (1990) and confirming the States' power to regulate it. Article 47, a Directive Principle, directs the State to raise public health and to bring about prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health, except for medicinal purposes.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS2 asks how rights are balanced against state power —** Questions on reasonable restrictions, judicial review of delegated legislation and the proportionality doctrine appear often in GS2 and in Law optional. This case is a neat example because the aim, preventing deaths, is compelling, and the Court still asked for evidence that the rule worked. 2. **Hooch tragedies are a recurring governance and GS4 case —** Deaths from spurious liquor recur in States with and without prohibition. They raise questions of enforcement, inter-department coordination and the ethics of prohibition policy, all of which suit GS2 governance and GS4 case studies.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 19(1)(g) guarantees to all citizens the right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6). • Article 47, a Directive Principle of State Policy, directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health. • Entry 8 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule covers intoxicating liquors, including their production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale. • In State of U.P. v. Lalta Prasad Vaish (2024), a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court held that States can regulate industrial alcohol under the entry for intoxicating liquors. • The Poisons Act, 1919 empowers State governments to make rules regulating the possession and sale of poisons. • The proportionality test requires that a restriction on a right pursue a legitimate aim, be suitable to achieve it, be necessary as the least restrictive means, and strike a proper balance. • Methanol is metabolised in the body into formaldehyde and formic acid, which cause metabolic acidosis and damage to the optic nerve.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Court has asked the State to prove that its rule works, which is a healthy**

standard — For years, courts deferred to safety regulations as long as the aim sounded good. By asking whether denaturing actually prevents hooch, the Court has applied evidence-based review, and Maharashtra could not show that colour and bitterness stop anyone. Illicit liquor makers use stolen or diverted methanol, and colour can be masked by the dark colour of country liquor. A rule that burdens every honest user while leaving the criminal untouched fails both efficiency and fairness.

2. **The ruling shifts the fight from the product to the supply chain** — The guidelines say where the real leakage happens: in transport, excess stocks and unregulated storage. Sealed dedicated tankers, excise supervision, return of unused methanol and stock records target diversion, which is where methanol leaves the legal economy. This is a better design because it concentrates cost on the points of risk. The weakness is that such controls require capable excise departments, which many States lack.
3. **The counter-view: denaturing is common practice elsewhere** — Denatured alcohol, where an additive makes ethanol undrinkable, is widely used for industrial alcohol, and Maharashtra could argue that it simply extended the logic to methanol. But ethanol is drunk, so making it undrinkable directly addresses misuse, whereas methanol is already poisonous and is mixed in by criminals who do not care about its taste. The analogy therefore fails on the facts. The Court did not reject regulation; it rejected a regulation that did not fit its target.
4. **Hooch is a demand-side problem that rules on chemicals cannot solve alone** — Poor drinkers buy illicit liquor because it is cheaper than legal liquor, often because of high excise duty or prohibition. The Court's call for de-addiction and counselling centres recognises that demand matters. States that raise liquor taxes sharply for revenue or impose prohibition without enforcement capacity create the market that hooch fills. Any serious policy must look at the price gap between legal and illicit liquor, which the guidelines do not address.
5. **Industrial users are also rights-holders, and the judgment says so clearly** — Paint, resin and pharmaceutical firms are part of the manufacturing base, and a rule that makes their inputs unusable affects jobs and exports. The judgment affirms that Article 19(1)(g) is not a lesser right to be traded away casually in the name of safety. That matters for ease of doing business, because subordinate rules framed after a tragedy often outlive their usefulness. Periodic review of such rules, which the Court recommends for licences, should apply to the rules themselves.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"A legitimate aim does not save an unsuitable means." In the light of the Supreme Court's ruling on Maharashtra's methanol rules, discuss the application of the proportionality doctrine to economic regulation in India. What should an effective strategy against hooch tragedies include? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — State the ruling: on September 18, Rules 18A and 18B of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972 were struck down as violating Articles 14 and 19(1)(g) because the colourant-bitterant and licence rules did not prevent hooch.
2. **Body — the doctrine** — Explain the proportionality test from Modern Dental College (2016) and Puttaswamy (2017), with Article 19(6) and the non-arbitrariness doctrine under Article 14. Show how the rules failed at suitability and necessity.
3. **Body — regulation and federal power** — Explain that States have power under the Poisons Act, 1919 and Entry 8 of the State List, confirmed for industrial alcohol in Lalta Prasad Vaish (2024), and that Article 47 guides policy. The issue was not power but design.
4. **Body — an effective strategy** — Use the Court's guidelines: inter-departmental coordination, licence verification and review, stock records and return of excess,

	sealed tankers under excise supervision, border checks, and de-addiction centres. Add a demand-side point on the price gap and on quick medical response with antidotes in district hospitals. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that good regulation targets the point of harm and is backed by evidence, and that the ruling protects both lives and lawful livelihoods.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are District Magistrate after a hooch tragedy kills twelve people. What are your first 48 hours?** ***Approach:*** I would first save lives: alert all hospitals, arrange antidotes and dialysis support, and announce symptoms publicly so that others who drank come forward. I would order raids on the source, seal the supply and trace where the methanol came from, since the Court's guidelines point to diversion from industrial users. I would coordinate excise, police and health departments through a single control room and announce relief for families. Accountability of local officials who ignored complaints should follow a quick inquiry. **Q2. As Excise Commissioner, how would you implement the Supreme Court's methanol guidelines without harming industry?** ***Approach:*** I would build a digital register of every methanol licence holder, with monthly stock and consumption returns and GPS tracking of dedicated tankers. Surprise audits would focus on users whose consumption does not match production. I would set a return system for excess methanol and simplify licence renewal for compliant firms. Industry accepts controls that are predictable and targeted; it resists blanket rules that make its products unusable. **Q3. An interview board asks: should a government make rules quickly after a tragedy?** ***Approach:*** Governments must respond quickly to a tragedy, but quick rules made without evidence can burden the innocent and miss the guilty, as the methanol case shows. The better approach is immediate enforcement under existing law, followed by rules framed after consultation and a review of what failed. Rules should carry a review clause so that they are tested against results. Public anger is a reason to act, not a reason to skip thinking.

1.5 Karnataka High Court Orders De Novo SIT Probe Into KPSC Scam, Calls PSC 'Constitutional Sentinel'

THE NEWS Bengaluru. On Monday, September 21, Justice M. Nagaprasanna of the Karnataka High Court directed that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Director-General of Police Alok Kumar conduct a "de novo" investigation — one from the beginning — into alleged irregularities in recruitment by the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC), The Indian Express and The Hindu report. The case centres on the recruitment of 400 Veterinary Officers and involves the suspended KPSC chairman Shivashankarappa S. Sahukar as one of the accused. Refusing a CBI transfer, the court said: "I do not deem it appropriate to permit investigations at the hands of the CID or the local police. I am equally not persuaded that entrustment of investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation is the only available course. In exercise of the jurisdiction of this court under Article 226, I deem it appropriate to constitute a special investigation team." The SIT, with four other IPS officers, must complete the probe within 100 days and file progress reports every 30 days; the CID and local police must hand over all material. The SIT must also cooperate with the Enforcement Directorate, which has registered an ECIR, the ED's case record under the money-laundering law. The petitions included one by veterinarian Dr S. Manjunath and one by BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal seeking a CBI probe into the appointment of Mr. Sahukar's daughter as an industrial extension officer, allegedly with a forged income certificate, besides pleas by a students' association and candidates. The case began with the KPSC's own complaint to the Vidhana Soudha police and moved to the CID, which petitioners called an "eyewash". The court said a Public Service Commission is not merely a recruiting agency but a "Constitutional sentinel at the gateway to public employment", and that when marks are manipulated, answer scripts or OMR sheets tampered with, or selections purchased, "it is a fraud upon the Constitution itself". Otherwise, it warned, the guarantee of equality of opportunity under Articles 14 and 16 would become "an empty parchment promise". The Express, whose September 19 investigation reported that Mr. Sahukar was picked by the BJP in 2019 and shielded by the Congress government after 2023, listed alleged irregularities including withheld marks, bribes sought from top scorers, manipulated interview panels, altered tabulation records, tampered answer sheets and leaked papers. The syllabus link is constitutional bodies and the integrity of public recruitment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

KPSC chairman appointed in 2019 and retained across a change of government → aspirants allege withheld marks, tampered sheets, rigged interviews and leaked papers → KPSC's own complaint goes to local police and then the CID, which petitioners call an eyewash → students, candidates and an MLA seek a CBI probe → High Court under Article 226 orders a de novo, court-monitored SIT with a 100-day deadline

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Public Service Commissions are constitutional bodies with protected tenure —** Article 315 provides for a Public Service Commission for the Union and for each State, and allows a Joint State PSC by parliamentary law if the States concerned pass resolutions. Under Article 316, the chairman and members of a State PSC are appointed by the Governor, and at least half the members must have held office for ten years under the Government of India or a State. A member holds office for six years or until the age of 62, whichever is earlier, while for UPSC the age limit is 65. Article 322 charges the Commission's expenses on the Consolidated Fund of the State, so they are not voted by the legislature. 2. **Only the President can remove a State PSC chairman, after a Supreme Court inquiry —** Under Article 317(1), the chairman or a member of a State PSC can be removed on the ground of misbehaviour only by order of the President after the Supreme Court, on a reference, has inquired and reported that the person ought to be removed. Under Article 317(2), the Governor may suspend the chairman or member of a State PSC while such a reference is pending. Article 317(3) allows removal by the President for insolvency, paid employment outside the office, or infirmity of mind or body. This design protects the Commission from political pressure, but it also makes it slow to remove a compromised head. 3. **Article 16 and the High Court's writ power are the legal tools of the case —** Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters of public employment, and it is a specific application of Article 14. Article 226 empowers a High Court to issue writs for enforcement of fundamental rights "and for any other purpose", which makes it wider than the Supreme Court's Article 32 power. In State of West Bengal v. Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (2010), a Constitution Bench held that constitutional courts can transfer an investigation to the CBI in exceptional cases, but cautioned that this power must be used sparingly. 4. **Recruitment fraud now has a dedicated central law, and money-laundering links bring in the ED —** The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 covers examinations conducted by bodies such as the UPSC, SSC, railway recruitment boards, banking recruitment bodies and the NTA, with punishment of three to five years and fine up to ₹10 lakh, and higher penalties for organised crime. State PSC examinations are governed by State laws. The ED's Enforcement Case Information Report is an internal document under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, and the Supreme Court held in Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India (2022) that it is not equivalent to an FIR.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS2 names constitutional bodies and their functioning —** UPSC has asked about the constitutional position of the UPSC and State PSCs and the challenges to their independence. Repeated State recruitment scandals give an answer on this topic current examples, and the Karnataka ruling provides quotable language. 2. **Paper leaks and recruitment fraud are a youth and governance issue —** The 2024

	central law on unfair means followed leaks in major examinations, and several States have their own laws. Questions on the integrity of public recruitment connect GS2 governance, GS4 probity and the Essay paper.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 316, the chairman and members of a State Public Service Commission are appointed by the Governor and hold office for six years or until the age of 62, whichever is earlier. ● Under Article 317, a chairman or member of a State Public Service Commission can be removed for misbehaviour only by the President after an inquiry by the Supreme Court on a reference. ● Article 317(2) allows the Governor to suspend a chairman or member of a State Public Service Commission while a reference to the Supreme Court is pending. ● Article 322 provides that the expenses of a State Public Service Commission are charged on the Consolidated Fund of the State. ● Article 323(2) requires a State Public Service Commission to present an annual report to the Governor, which is laid before the State Legislature with a memorandum on cases where the Commission's advice was not accepted. ● Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State. ● The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 applies to examinations conducted by bodies such as the UPSC, SSC, railway recruitment boards and the National Testing Agency.
ANALYSIS	1. **The court chose a middle path that keeps accountability inside the State —** Refusing the CBI while removing the CID is a calibrated choice. A CBI transfer would have taken months to start and raised federal friction, while the CID had lost credibility with the petitioners. A court-monitored SIT of senior State officers, with a 100-day deadline and monthly reports, combines local knowledge with judicial oversight. The risk is that State officers may still feel pressure from the same political establishment, which is why the monthly reporting to the court is the most important part of the order. 2. **Constitutional protection of tenure became a shield for misconduct —** Article 317 was designed to protect PSC members from being removed for displeasing governments. The Express report that the chairman stayed on despite red flags under two governments of rival parties shows the other side of that protection: no government had an incentive to start the slow removal procedure. The solution is not to weaken tenure but to strengthen appointment, with transparent criteria and scrutiny before selection, because removal is designed to be difficult. States that appoint PSC heads for political loyalty import the problem at the start. 3. **Calling fraud a fraud upon the Constitution raises the standard of remedy —** By treating recruitment malpractice as a breach of Articles 14 and 16, rather than a mere exam irregularity, the court has signalled that tainted selections cannot be protected just because some candidates were innocent. This will matter when the court decides whether to cancel the entire recruitment. The counter-view is that cancelling everything punishes honest candidates who have already served. Courts have usually separated the tainted from the untainted where possible and cancelled the whole process only when the fraud is systemic and cannot be separated. 4. **Recruitment integrity is an economic issue for the educated young —** For a young person preparing for years, a rigged State recruitment destroys time, money and trust, and pushes talent away from public service. When public jobs are sold, the cost is paid by poorer candidates without networks, which reverses the social mobility that public employment is meant to provide. Karnataka's case, with alleged bribes demanded

	from top scorers, shows how merit itself becomes a target. The State's stake is not just justice for 400 posts but the credibility of every future examination.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Public Service Commissions are constitutional sentinels at the gateway to public employment." In the light of recent recruitment scandals, examine the constitutional safeguards for State Public Service Commissions and suggest reforms to secure their integrity. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Begin with the Karnataka High Court's order of September 21 constituting a de novo SIT under DGP Alok Kumar into the KPSC scam involving 400 Veterinary Officer posts, and its description of the PSC as a constitutional sentinel. 2. **Body — constitutional design —** Explain Articles 315 to 323: appointment by the Governor, fixed tenure, removal only by the President after Supreme Court inquiry, expenses charged on the Consolidated Fund, bar on further employment under Article 319 and the annual report under Article 323. 3. **Body — why safeguards failed —** Use the reported pattern: political appointment in 2019, retention despite red flags, withheld marks, tampered sheets, manipulated interview panels and leaks. Show how tenure protection without appointment scrutiny can shield misconduct. 4. **Body — reforms —** Suggest a transparent search committee for PSC appointments, digital end-to-end evaluation with audit trails, reduced interview weightage, independent vigilance cells, State laws on unfair means similar to the 2024 central Act, and time-bound Article 317 references. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that equality of opportunity under Article 16 is only as strong as the institution that runs the examination, and that trust once lost takes years to rebuild.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the newly appointed Secretary of a State PSC after a scam. What are your first reforms?** ***Approach:*** I would first secure the evaluation chain: digital scanning of answer sheets, coded evaluation, and an audit log of every change in marks. I would publish marks and answer keys promptly so that candidates can check them, and reduce discretionary interview marks. I would set up an internal vigilance cell reporting to the full Commission. Visible transparency is the fastest way to tell aspirants that the process can be trusted again. **Q2. An interview board asks: should all tainted recruitments be cancelled, even if some candidates were honest?** ***Approach:*** It depends on whether the tainted can be separated from the untainted. Where the fraud is limited and identifiable, only the tainted selections should be cancelled, because punishing honest candidates is also injustice. Where it is systemic, such as leaked papers or altered tabulation across the board, the whole process loses legitimacy and must be redone. The decision must be based on the investigation's findings, not on public anger. **Q3. As a member of the SIT, you are under pressure to finish in 100 days. How would you plan the probe?** ***Approach:*** I would first take over and index all the CID material so that nothing is lost, then pick the most documentary lines, such as tabulation records and OMR sheets, for forensic examination early. I would record statements of aspirants who complained and of evaluators, and coordinate with the ED on money trails. Monthly reports to the court would state progress and obstacles honestly. A time limit should improve focus,

	not lead to a hurried chargesheet.

2. Economy

Every story today is about India paying for something it wants and deciding whether the price is right. It is paying with market access for a trade partner's investment pledge, with sterilisation costs and exchange-rate risk for a larger reserve pile, with fiscal incentives for Indian ownership of brands and intellectual property, and with statistical revisions for a truer measure of the economy. The Tamil Nadu arithmetic states the lesson plainly: an ambition is only as good as the savings, capital efficiency and fiscal discipline that pay for it.

2.1 India–New Zealand FTA Enters into Force on October 20 with Zero Duty for All Indian Exports

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and New Zealand will come into force on October 20, 2026, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal announced on Monday, September 21, at a video conference with New Zealand's Minister of Trade and Investment, Todd McClay. The pact was signed in New Delhi on April 27; New Zealand's parliament passed the enabling legislation on September 16 with 93 MPs in favour and 29 against, The Economic Times reports. An FTA is a treaty under which two countries cut or remove customs duties on most of each other's goods, usually with rules on services, investment and the movement of people. From the first day, all Indian exports across all tariff lines get zero-duty access to New Zealand, which currently levies peak tariffs of up to 10% on Indian ceramics, automobiles and auto parts. New Zealand gets tariff-free access on 57% of its exports to India initially, rising to 82% when fully phased in, with tariffs eliminated or reduced on 95% of its exports by value. India has kept dairy and sensitive farm goods — peas, onions, chickpeas, almonds, artificial honey, corn and sugar — outside concessions. "Dairy we don't open for anyone," Mr. Goyal said. Apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey get calibrated access through tariff rate quotas (a fixed volume at a lower duty, with the normal duty beyond it) carrying a minimum import price and seasonal windows. Stricter rules of origin deny benefits to third-country goods routed via New Zealand, and a bilateral safeguard mechanism will run for 14 years after duty cuts. New Zealand has committed to facilitate up to $20 billion of investment in India over 15 years. Indian professionals get a quota of 5,000 Temporary Employment Entry visas at any time, with stays of up to three years, and expanded post-study work pathways. The target is to double bilateral trade in goods and services to almost ₹35,000 crore in four to five years. The papers differ on the base: The Hindu puts bilateral trade at $1.3 billion in 2024-25, The Economic Times at about $2.4 billion in FY25. The date coincides with Vijaya Dashami. Mr. Goyal also said India is studying the new U.S. law on Russian-oil tariffs and expects "good news" on a Chile deal. The syllabus link is GS3 on trade and the effects of liberalisation, and GS2 on bilateral agreements.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India walks out of RCEP in 2019, fearing a flood of imports and dairy competition → shifts to bilateral deals with safeguards built in → negotiates with New Zealand in about nine months, with dairy kept out and investment and visas written in → signed on April 27, New Zealand's parliament passes the law on September 16 → entry into force on October 20 amid rising global tariffs

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **WTO law allows FTAs only as an exception to most-favoured-nation treatment —** Article I of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) obliges every WTO member to extend any tariff concession it gives one member to all members, which is the most-favoured-nation (MFN) principle. Article XXIV of GATT permits customs unions and free trade areas as an exception, provided duties are eliminated on "substantially all the trade" between the parties within a reasonable period. Article V of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is the matching provision for services. This is why an FTA must cover the bulk of trade and cannot be a narrow bargain on a few products.

2. **Rules of origin decide which goods are really "made in" a partner country —** A rule of origin sets the conditions — a minimum share of local value addition, or a change in tariff classification — that a product must meet to claim the lower FTA duty. Without it, a third country could route its goods through the FTA partner with minimal processing, a practice called trade deflection. India tightened enforcement through the Customs (Administration of Rules of Origin under Trade Agreements) Rules, 2020, known as CAROTAR, notified under the Customs Act, 1962. Strict origin rules are a

	common Indian demand in every recent negotiation. 3. **Tariff rate quotas and safeguards are the valves in a trade agreement —** A tariff rate quota allows a set quantity of a product in at a low or zero duty, while imports above that quantity pay the normal duty. A bilateral safeguard mechanism lets a country temporarily suspend or raise the preferential duty if imports under the agreement surge and cause or threaten serious injury to domestic producers. In India, safeguard investigations are conducted by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies under the Commerce Ministry. These tools allow a country to open a market while keeping a brake for politically sensitive sectors. 4. **India's recent trade deals follow a new template after the RCEP exit —** India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in November 2019, citing concerns over its trade deficit with China and the absence of adequate safeguards; New Zealand is an RCEP member. Since then India has signed the India–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (2022), the India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (2022) and the India–EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (signed 2024), the last with an investment commitment attached. Dairy has been kept out of every one. Movement of professionals falls under Mode 4 of GATS, the temporary presence of natural persons.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The GS3 syllabus asks about the effects of liberalisation and trade —** Questions on FTAs have asked why India's trade deficit widened with FTA partners, and what India gained or lost by leaving RCEP. The New Zealand deal is a clean case study for a "new generation" FTA: small partner, sensitive sector protected, investment and mobility written in. 2. **Prelims tests the vocabulary of trade agreements —** UPSC has asked about the MFN principle, the difference between FTAs and preferential trade agreements, and the membership of RCEP and other blocs. Tariff rate quotas, rules of origin and safeguards are the natural next set, and this story explains all three with a real example. 3. **GS2 links trade to India's Indo-Pacific diplomacy —** New Zealand is a Pacific democracy and a member of RCEP and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). An answer on India's engagement in the Pacific can use this deal as evidence that India prefers bilateral trade architecture to mega-regional blocs.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade permits free trade areas and customs unions as an exception to the most-favoured-nation obligation, provided duties are eliminated on substantially all trade between the parties. ● A tariff rate quota allows a specified quantity of a product to be imported at a lower duty, with a higher duty applying to quantities beyond the quota. ● Rules of origin determine whether a good qualifies as originating in an FTA partner and is therefore eligible for preferential duty; India's procedural rules for this are the CAROTAR, 2020, framed under the Customs Act, 1962. ● A bilateral safeguard mechanism in an FTA allows a party to temporarily raise or suspend preferential duties when a surge in imports under the agreement causes or threatens serious injury to domestic industry. ● India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in November 2019; New Zealand is a member of RCEP. ● The temporary movement of professionals to supply services is classified as Mode 4 under the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services.

	• In India, trade remedy investigations, including safeguard investigations, are conducted by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
ANALYSIS	1. **India has conceded tariffs it barely needed and protected the only sector that mattered —** New Zealand's tariffs on Indian goods were already low, with peaks of up to 10%, so zero-duty access from day one is worth less than it sounds. What New Zealand wanted most was dairy, and India refused it outright. The real exchange is therefore Indian market access for kiwifruit, apples, wood and wool against an investment pledge and visas. That is a sensible bargain for a large importer, but it also means the headline '100% of exports duty-free' will not by itself move India's export numbers much. 2. **The $20 billion is a facilitation promise, not a purchase order —** The papers are careful to say New Zealand has committed to 'facilitate' up to $20 billion of investment over 15 years. A government cannot direct private and pension-fund capital, so the figure depends on whether Indian projects offer returns. The EFTA agreement set the template of pairing tariff cuts with investment targets, and the credibility of this model will be judged by actual flows, not by announcements. The counter-view is that even a soft pledge institutionalises follow-up, since a missed target becomes a matter for review between governments. 3. **The labour clause is the part that touches Indian households directly —** A quota of 5,000 Temporary Employment Entry visas at any time, with stays of up to three years, and post-study work pathways matter more to young Indians than most tariff lines. Mobility has been India's hardest demand in negotiations with rich countries, which prefer to talk about goods. Getting a numbered quota written into a treaty sets a precedent India can cite with larger partners. Its limit is scale: 5,000 is small next to Indian demand, so the clause is a door opened slightly, not a labour market opened. 4. **The disputed trade base shows why targets need clean statistics —** The Hindu reports bilateral trade of $1.3 billion in 2024-25, The Economic Times about $2.4 billion in FY25; the gap is most likely goods alone versus goods and services, though the papers do not say so. A target of doubling to 'almost ₹35,000 crore' is meaningful only if the base is fixed. When a treaty's success is measured against an unclear number, every side can claim victory. Commerce Ministry reporting on FTA utilisation — how many exporters actually claim the preference — is the better test, and India has historically had low utilisation of its FTAs. 5. **Small, fast deals are India's answer to a tariff-hostile world —** Mr. McClay framed the deal against escalating tariffs, and the same press conference turned to the U.S. law allowing tariffs of up to 100% on buyers of Russian oil. India cannot control U.S. policy, but it can diversify markets through quick agreements with Chile, Canada and others. Nine months of negotiation is fast by Indian standards. The risk is fragmentation: many small deals with different origin rules raise compliance costs for exporters, which is why the Customs origin framework and exporter awareness matter as much as signatures.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's recent free trade agreements trade tariff concessions for investment and mobility commitments while ring-fencing sensitive sectors." Examine this statement with reference to the India–New Zealand FTA. How far can such agreements help India diversify its trade in an environment of rising protectionism? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State that the India–New Zealand FTA, signed on April 27, comes into force on October 20, 2026, with zero duty on all Indian exports, a $20 billion investment facilitation pledge over 15 years and dairy kept out.

	2. **Body — the template —** Explain the three parts of the new template: tariff concessions with tariff rate quotas, minimum import prices and a 14-year safeguard; investment commitments on the EFTA model; and Mode 4 mobility through 5,000 Temporary Employment Entry visas. Contrast with the RCEP exit of 2019. 3. **Body — limits —** Point out that New Zealand's tariffs were already low, that investment pledges are facilitation rather than obligations, that the mobility quota is small, and that India's FTA utilisation has historically been low. Mention the dispute over the trade base as a data problem. 4. **Body — diversification value —** Link to the U.S. law allowing tariffs on buyers of Russian oil and the pending deals with Chile and Canada. Argue that many small agreements spread risk but raise compliance costs, requiring strong rules-of-origin administration and exporter outreach. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the value of such FTAs lies less in tariff lines than in the durable rules they create for investment and people, and that success should be measured by utilisation and actual capital flows.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry. Apple growers in Himachal Pradesh fear the FTA will hurt prices. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would explain that New Zealand apples enter only through a tariff rate quota with a minimum import price and seasonal windows, so imports cannot undercut domestic prices in the harvest season. I would commit to monthly monitoring of import volumes and prices with the State government. If a surge causes injury, the bilateral safeguard mechanism allows us to act, and growers' associations should know how to petition the Directorate General of Trade Remedies. Transparency with data is the best reassurance. **Q2. As a District Collector in an export cluster, how would you help small exporters actually use the FTA?** ***Approach:*** Most small exporters do not claim FTA benefits because they do not understand origin rules and certificates. I would run camps with the District Export Promotion Committee, the export promotion councils and the certifying agencies to explain how to obtain a certificate of origin. I would identify products in the cluster that faced New Zealand duties earlier and connect exporters with buyers. The measure of success is the number of certificates issued, not the number of meetings held. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India ever open its dairy sector in a trade deal?** ***Approach:*** Dairy supports crores of small and landless households, many of them women, through cooperatives, so its opening is a livelihood question rather than a trade question. Opening it to highly efficient, subsidised exporters could depress farm-gate prices before productivity improves. At the same time, permanent protection can breed complacency, and India is itself a dairy exporter in some products. A defensible position is to keep liquid milk and basic products protected while negotiating on niche high-value products under quotas once domestic productivity rises.

2.2 RBI Swap Window Draws $143.6 Billion, Led by $133 Billion FCNR(B) Deposits; Op-ed Questions the Cost

THE NEWS Mumbai. Data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday, September 21, show that its special US dollar–rupee swap facility attracted $143.596 billion of foreign currency inflows as reported by banks till September 18, The Indian Express reports. Of this, Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) or FCNR(B) deposits — deposits that Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) keep in Indian banks in foreign currency rather than rupees — accounted for $132.98 billion, Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) $5.32 billion and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs), meaning loans raised abroad by Indian entities, $5.296 billion. The previous update, on September 2, had shown about $127 billion of FCNR(B) deposits. The facility was introduced on June 8; banks could mobilise fresh three-to-five-year FCNR(B) deposits and swap the dollars with the RBI at a concessional rate, reducing their hedging cost. A swap here means the bank sells dollars to the RBI today and agrees to buy them back at a fixed rate on maturity. The RBI's own press release of September 2, retrieved from rbi.org.in, confirms that the FCNR(B) window closed on August 31 while the ECB and OFCB windows remain open till December 31, 2026. The Economic Times reports that banks raised more in the last 10 days of the window than the $65.4 billion collected in the first 74 days, and that the total is more than five times the $26 billion raised under a similar scheme in 2013. Gaura Sengupta of IDFC First Bank expects total inflows to reach $160 billion by December, while Madhavi Arora of Emkay Global said rising global bond yields make ECBs less attractive. The Hindu reports that S&P cautioned the surge is unlikely to recur. In an ET op-ed, Rajeswari Sengupta of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research notes that reserves rose from $682 billion when the scheme was launched on June 5 to $785 billion on September 4 and that the rupee, which in May seemed headed towards ₹100 to the dollar, stabilised at ₹94-96. But the swaps injected more than ₹10 lakh crore of rupee liquidity; mopping it up by selling ₹10 lakh crore of 10-year securities at about 7% would cost about ₹70,000 crore a year, and the RBI bears exchange-rate risk when the swaps reverse. The syllabus link is GS3 on the external sector, monetary policy and money supply.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rupee slides towards ₹100 to the dollar in May → RBI opens a concessional swap window on June 8 so that banks can raise dollars without hedging cost → NRIs deposit about $133 billion in FCNR(B) accounts before the window closes on August 31 → reserves rise to $785 billion and the rupee steadies at ₹94-96, but more than ₹10 lakh crore of rupee liquidity floods the system → the RBI must now pay to sterilise it and carry the exchange risk until the swaps mature

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **FCNR(B), NRE and NRO accounts differ on currency, repatriation and exchange risk —** Under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 and RBI regulations, NRIs may hold three main deposit types. FCNR(B) accounts are term deposits held in freely convertible foreign currency for one to five years, and the exchange-rate risk lies with the bank, not the depositor. Non-Resident External (NRE) accounts are held in rupees, fully repatriable, and the depositor bears the exchange risk. Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) accounts hold income earned in India, are held in rupees, and repatriation from them is capped.

2. **Every dollar the RBI buys creates rupees that must be absorbed or tolerated —** When the RBI buys foreign currency, it pays in rupees, which expands banks' reserves and the money supply. If the RBI does not want this extra liquidity to push interest rates below its policy rate and fuel inflation, it sterilises the inflow — it withdraws the rupees through open market sales of government securities, the Standing Deposit Facility introduced in 2022, variable rate reverse repo auctions, or a higher Cash Reserve Ratio under Section 42 of the RBI Act, 1934. The Market Stabilisation Scheme of 2004 allowed the government to issue special securities for this purpose. Each tool shifts the cost to someone: the RBI, the government or the banks.

3. **The impossible trinity limits what a central bank can do at once —** The impossible trinity, or trilemma, holds that a country cannot simultaneously have a fixed exchange rate, free capital movement and an independent monetary policy; it can pick only two. India runs a managed float with partially open capital flows, so large interventions in the currency market always have consequences for domestic liquidity and interest rates. The swap window is an attempt to stabilise the rupee through capital inflows, and sterilisation is the attempt to keep monetary policy independent. The op-ed is, in effect, asking what that combination costs.

4. **The 2013 FCNR(B) window is the precedent —** In September 2013, after the 'taper tantrum' triggered by the U.S. Federal Reserve's signal that it would slow bond purchases, the rupee fell sharply and the RBI opened a concessional swap window for fresh FCNR(B) deposits and bank borrowings abroad. The window helped stabilise the rupee and rebuild reserves. When those deposits matured in 2016, the RBI managed the outflow smoothly. The 2026 scheme is far larger, which is why its maturity profile,

	three to five years out, now matters.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 asks about capital flows and the rupee —** The syllabus covers mobilisation of resources, monetary policy and the external sector. Mains questions have asked about the causes of rupee depreciation, the adequacy of forex reserves and the role of NRI deposits. This scheme gives a live example with numbers attached. 2. **Prelims loves the difference between NRI account types and RBI liquidity tools —** UPSC has asked about the features of NRE and FCNR deposits, the effects of RBI buying or selling dollars, sterilisation, and the Standing Deposit Facility. The FCNR(B) story ties them into one mechanism a student can remember. 3. **The op-ed angle is how UPSC frames trade-offs —** An answer that goes beyond 'the scheme succeeded' to ask 'at what cost, to whom' reflects the examiner's preference for critical evaluation. The cost of sterilisation and the RBI's dividend to the government are fair material for GS3 questions on fiscal-monetary interaction.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNR(B), deposits are held in freely convertible foreign currency for one to five years, and the exchange-rate risk on them is borne by the bank. • Non-Resident External (NRE) accounts are maintained in Indian rupees and are fully repatriable, while repatriation from Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) accounts is subject to a cap. • Sterilisation is the central bank's withdrawal of domestic liquidity created by its foreign exchange purchases, through instruments such as open market sales, the Standing Deposit Facility or the Cash Reserve Ratio. • The Cash Reserve Ratio is prescribed by the RBI under Section 42 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, and banks earn no interest on CRR balances. • The impossible trinity states that a country cannot simultaneously maintain a fixed exchange rate, free capital mobility and an independent monetary policy. • The Market Stabilisation Scheme, introduced in 2004, allows the government to issue securities whose proceeds are held with the RBI to absorb excess liquidity arising from capital inflows. • In a foreign exchange buy-sell swap, the RBI buys dollars from a bank now and agrees to sell them back at a pre-agreed rate on a future date.
ANALYSIS	1. **Measuring the scheme by dollars raised is measuring the input, not the outcome —** Rajeswari Sengupta's central point is that $133 billion is a cost as well as a gain, because each dollar is a liability that must be repaid with interest. Reserves of $682 billion were already more than enough to finance a balance-of-payments deficit, so the marginal value of another $100 billion is modest. The benefit claimed is the steadier rupee, but a rupee at ₹95 rather than ₹100 is not obviously better for an economy whose exporters face cheap Chinese competition. The counter-view is that exchange-rate panic can itself be destabilising, and a credible defence in May may have prevented a self-fulfilling run whose costs would have been larger than any sterilisation bill. 2. **The ₹70,000 crore sterilisation bill has to land somewhere —** If the RBI sells securities, its income falls and so does the dividend it pays the government, which weakens the Budget. If the government issues special securities, the cost goes straight to the fiscal deficit. If the RBI raises the CRR, banks that never received a dollar are penalised and those paying NRIs 6-7% earn nothing on the parked money. There is no costless option, and the choice among them is really a choice about who pays for the rupee's stability. The honest offset is the interest the RBI earns on the additional reserves invested

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abroad, which the op-ed says reduces but does not remove the net cost.

3. The RBI has swapped a present currency problem for a future one — The swaps must be reversed at the agreed rate when deposits mature in three to five years. If the rupee depreciates to ₹105 by then, the op-ed calculates a loss of ₹10 per dollar on an enormous base. The deposits also carry a bunching risk: a huge sum maturing close together can create a fresh episode of pressure on the rupee if NRIs choose not to renew. The 2013 experience was manageable because the amount was a fraction of today’s; the RBI will need to plan the exit years ahead, perhaps through forward purchases.

4. Time was bought, but not used to fix the balance of payments — The strongest justification for costly capital is that it buys time for structural repair — more FDI, deeper equity inflows, export competitiveness. The op-ed notes that no such measures have been announced, and that the rupee has begun to fall again as the war in West Asia intensifies. Borrowed dollars cannot substitute for earned dollars, from exports or long-term investment. The capital factor of production is strengthened only when inflows finance productive investment, not when they sit as reserves.

5. The surge in the final days shows how price-sensitive NRI capital is — Banks collected more in the last 10 days than the $65.4 billion of the first 74 days, which suggests depositors and banks were arbitraging a concession before it expired rather than making long-term commitments to India. S&P’s warning that the surge will not repeat and the talk of discouraging ECBs now that global yields are high both point the same way. Policy that relies on incentives of this kind must assume the money is mobile and will leave when the incentive ends.
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<td>POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION</td>
<td>“Forex reserves built through borrowed inflows are a buffer with a bill attached.” Critically examine the RBI’s 2026 FCNR(B) swap window in the light of the costs of sterilisation and exchange-rate risk. What should be the strategy for managing its maturity? (15 marks, 250 words)</td>
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<td>MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION</td>
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1. Introduction — Give the facts: a swap facility opened on June 8, FCNR(B) window closed on August 31, total inflows of $143.6 billion reported till September 18, with FCNR(B) deposits at about $133 billion, and reserves rising from $682 billion to $785 billion.

2. Body — the benefits — Explain the rupee’s stabilisation at ₹94-96 after nearing ₹100, stable medium-term funding for banks with high credit-deposit ratios, and the psychological value of a strong reserve position during the West Asia war.

3. Body — the costs — Explain sterilisation of more than ₹10 lakh crore, the illustrative ₹70,000 crore annual cost, the three ways of distributing it (RBI, government, banks via CRR), and the exchange-rate risk at maturity. Use the impossible trinity to explain why the cost arises.

4. Body — managing maturity — Suggest staggered forward purchases, encouraging renewal of deposits, building a stronger balance of payments through FDI and export promotion, and transparent disclosure of the RBI’s swap book so that markets are not surprised.

5. Conclusion — Conclude that the scheme was an effective emergency tool but that its true test will be whether the time it bought is used to strengthen the external sector before the deposits come due.
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<td>ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH</td>
<td>Q1. You are in the Department of Economic Affairs. The RBI signals that its dividend will fall because of sterilisation costs. How do you plan?</td>
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Approach: I would first ask the RBI for a range of estimates of the sterilisation cost and the income on the additional reserves, so the net figure is clear. I would build a lower dividend into the revised estimates rather than assume the previous year's figure and then face a shortfall. If the government is asked to share the cost through special securities, I would weigh it against the fiscal deficit target and explain the choice in the Budget documents. The key is that the cost is acknowledged openly rather than hidden across two balance sheets.

Q2. As head of treasury at a public sector bank, would you continue raising ECBs under the swap window now that global yields are high?

Approach: I would compare the all-in cost of the ECB, including the concession, with domestic funding options and the bank's actual need for foreign currency. If the loan is being taken only to meet a target, and not because the bank needs the funds, it adds a liability without a matching use. I would also consider the risk that the RBI discourages such borrowing informally. Prudence, not target-chasing, should guide a bank's balance sheet.

Q3. An interview board asks: is a strong rupee good for India?

Approach: A stable rupee is good because it lowers uncertainty for importers, borrowers and investors. A strong rupee is a different matter: it makes imports cheaper and helps control inflation, but it hurts exporters and domestic producers competing with imports. The right goal is an exchange rate that reflects fundamentals and moves without panic. Defending a particular level at great cost can become a burden, as the debate over the FCNR(B) scheme shows.

2.3 MoSPI Sources and Methods Report: New GDP Series Uses Double Deflation in 28 of 30 Manufacturing Categories

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Monday, September 21, released 'Sources and Methods for Compilation of National Accounts Statistics', the detailed manual behind the new GDP series introduced in February with 2022-23 as the base year, replacing 2011-12. The Indian Express reports that the new series uses 'double deflation' in 28 of 30 categories of the manufacturing sector, and that work is on to extend it to the remaining two — processing and preservation of meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, oils and fats; and pharmaceuticals, medicinal chemicals and botanical products — where a high share of imported inputs makes it "challenging" to map inputs to item-level Producer Price Indices. Gross Value Added (GVA) is the value of output minus the value of inputs. To get real GVA, which strips out price changes, double deflation adjusts output and input separately by their own price indices; single deflation divides both by the same index. Earlier, MoSPI used double deflation only for agriculture and for mining and quarrying, relying elsewhere on the Wholesale and Consumer Price Indices — one of the biggest criticisms of Indian data, since input and output prices often move at different rates. The document comes seven months after the series, the shortest gap ever; earlier such manuals took up to three years. It contains no new data and consolidates three reports of sub-committees of the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics published in February. The Economic Times reports that the series makes greater use of corporate filings, limited liability partnership records, GST data and labour surveys, and estimates the household and unincorporated sector directly through the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The Indian Express reports that nominal GVA attributed to 'households', the proxy for the informal sector, was cut by ₹2.9 lakh crore, or 2.7%, for 2022-23, led by construction, where the household share fell to 59% from 79%; trade and repair, hotels and restaurants, and road transport now look more informal. Former finance secretary Subhash Garg has argued that April-June 2025 nominal GDP was revised down to ₹80 lakh crore from ₹86 lakh crore to make the 7.8% growth of April-June 2026 "look better"; MoSPI says revisions follow the System of National Accounts 2008 and the IMF's Quarterly National Accounts Manual. The syllabus link is GS3 on growth and its measurement.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 2011-12 series is criticised for single deflation and weak informal-sector data → MoSPI sets up sub-committees under the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics → new series with base year 2022-23 released in

February, lowering past nominal GDP → critics say the revision flatters April-June 2026 growth of 7.8% → MoSPI publishes the full Sources and Methods manual in seven months, showing double deflation in 28 of 30 manufacturing categories and a smaller household sector

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **GVA and GDP are linked by taxes and subsidies on products —** Gross Value Added at basic prices measures the value created by producers: output minus intermediate consumption. GDP at market prices equals GVA at basic prices plus taxes on products minus subsidies on products. Nominal figures are at current prices; real figures are at constant prices of the base year, obtained by deflating with price indices. India has used GVA for sectoral growth and GDP for the headline number since the 2011-12 series was introduced in 2015. 2. **The base year is revised to capture a changing economy —** A base year is the reference year whose prices and structure are used to compute constant-price estimates. India's national accounts have moved through several bases, including 2004-05 and 2011-12, and now 2022-23, because old weights misrepresent new industries and new consumption patterns. A base revision also brings in new data sources, which is why past levels of GDP change. The National Statistical Office, created in 2019 by merging the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office, compiles the accounts under MoSPI. 3. **Single and double deflation give different answers when prices diverge —** Under single deflation, nominal GVA is divided by one price index, usually an output price index. Under double deflation, output is deflated by output prices and inputs by input prices, and real GVA is the difference. When input prices, for example of oil, fall faster than output prices, single deflation can overstate real growth, and vice versa. The United Nations' System of National Accounts 2008 recommends double deflation as the preferred method. 4. **The informal sector is measured by surveys, not filings —** The household sector in the national accounts includes unincorporated enterprises such as small shops, workshops and self-employed workers, and serves as the proxy for the informal economy. Because these units do not file company accounts, their output is estimated from surveys such as the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises and the Periodic Labour Force Survey, both conducted by the National Statistical Office. The institutional sectors in Indian accounts are the public sector, the private corporate sector and the household sector.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 names growth and its measurement —** Mains questions have asked about the controversy over India's GDP numbers after the 2015 revision and the credibility of official statistics. A question on the 2022-23 series, its methods and its critics is highly likely, and this document provides the answer's factual core. 2. **Prelims asks definitions from national accounts —** UPSC regularly tests the difference between GDP and GVA, factor cost and market prices, nominal and real, and the institutions that compile data. Double deflation and the base year are natural statement-based questions. 3. **Data credibility is an ethics and governance issue too —** The independence and transparency of statistical systems has come up in the context of delayed survey releases and the 2019 creation of the NSO. Publishing methods quickly is a governance improvement an answer can cite.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• GDP at market prices equals Gross Value Added at basic prices plus taxes on products minus subsidies on products. • Under double deflation, the output and intermediate inputs of a sector are

	deflated separately by their own price indices to obtain real Gross Value Added. ● India's new national accounts series uses 2022-23 as the base year, replacing the earlier base year of 2011-12. ● The National Statistical Office was formed in 2019 by merging the Central Statistics Office and the National Sample Survey Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. ● The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises and the Periodic Labour Force Survey are conducted by the National Statistical Office. ● The System of National Accounts 2008 is the international statistical standard for national accounts adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission. ● In India's national accounts, the household sector, which includes unincorporated enterprises, is used as a proxy for the informal sector.
ANALYSIS	1. **Double deflation answers the most serious technical criticism of the old series —** The charge against the 2011-12 series was that manufacturing growth looked strong partly because input prices, especially commodities, fell while output was deflated by the same index. Moving 28 of 30 manufacturing categories to double deflation removes that bias at its source. The two exceptions, food processing and pharmaceuticals, are import-heavy, and imports need their own price indices, which India still lacks at item level. This is a real improvement, but it also makes the new series less comparable with the old, so any growth comparison across the two needs care. 2. **A smaller informal sector is a finding, not automatically a flaw —** Cutting household GVA by ₹2.9 lakh crore for 2022-23 sounds like the informal economy has been written down. But the change comes largely from construction, where direct survey and corporate data show that more activity is formal than previously assumed. At the same time trade, hotels and road transport are found more informal than earlier estimates. The direction of the change matters less than whether it rests on direct measurement; ASUSE and PLFS are a better base than the old practice of extrapolating from corporate indicators. 3. **The Garg criticism is about revisions, not about method —** Subhash Garg's point is arithmetic: if last year's quarterly GDP is revised down from ₹86 lakh crore to ₹80 lakh crore, this year's growth rate rises even if this year's level is unchanged. MoSPI's answer, that revisions are systematic and follow SNA 2008 and the IMF manual, is correct in principle but does not address the timing. The way to settle such doubts is to publish the full back-series and the reconciliation between old and new estimates. Publishing the manual in seven months is a step in that direction, but data users will judge by whether the back-series follows. 4. **Speed of disclosure is itself a credibility asset —** In the past, manuals took up to three years, allowing suspicion to fill the gap. Releasing the methods within seven months, and noting it contains no new data, allows independent economists to replicate estimates. Statistical credibility is a public good: investors, the Finance Commission and the RBI all depend on it. The counter-view is that methods without underlying unit-level data still leave room for doubt, since outsiders cannot check the calculations. 5. **Better measurement of labour and enterprise is the real gain —** Using PLFS for labour input and ASUSE for small enterprises means that the national accounts now see the self-employed worker and the small shop more directly. That helps policy for the labour and entrepreneurship factors of production, since schemes for micro enterprises need an accurate count of their output. It also exposes the size of informality in hotels and transport, sectors where policy has assumed formalisation is progressing faster than it is.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Better methods can produce more accurate numbers and yet less trust." Discuss with reference to India's new GDP series with base year 2022-23 and the use of double deflation. What steps can strengthen the credibility of official statistics? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State that the new GDP series with base year 2022-23 was introduced in February and that MoSPI's Sources and Methods document, released on September 21, shows double deflation in 28 of 30 manufacturing categories. 2. **Body — the methodological gains —** Explain single versus double deflation with a simple example, the use of ASUSE and PLFS for the household sector, and greater use of corporate filings and GST data, consistent with SNA 2008. 3. **Body — why trust is contested —** Explain the downward revision of past nominal GDP, the ₹86 lakh crore to ₹80 lakh crore example cited by Subhash Garg for April-June 2025, the effect on the 7.8% growth figure, and the reduction of household GVA by ₹2.9 lakh crore. 4. **Body — strengthening credibility —** Suggest release of back-series and reconciliation tables, unit-level data access for researchers, a statutory and independent statistical commission, predictable release calendars and clear revision notes. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that numbers command trust when their methods are open and their revisions predictable, and that the quick release of the manual should be followed by full back-series data.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a MoSPI official. A former senior bureaucrat publicly alleges that revisions were made to flatter growth. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would respond with data rather than denial. I would publish the reconciliation between old and new estimates for the quarter in question, show which data sources caused the revision, and point to the revision policy that applies to all quarters. I would invite independent economists to examine the methods document. A statistical agency earns trust by showing its work, not by defending its conclusions. **Q2. As a State's Director of Economics and Statistics, how would the new methods affect your GSDP estimates?** ***Approach:*** State estimates must follow the national methods to remain comparable, so I would align our deflation and household-sector estimates with the new manual. I would need State-level ASUSE and PLFS samples to be large enough for reliable estimates, which may require additional State samples. I would explain to the State government that growth figures may change because of methods, not because of performance, so that the numbers are not misused politically. **Q3. An interview board asks: should the statistical system be made independent by law?** ***Approach:*** There is a strong case, because statistics are used to judge the government that produces them. A statutory commission with fixed tenure, a published release calendar and the power to publish without prior clearance would protect credibility. The counter-argument is that a statistical system needs government resources and cooperation from ministries. The balance is independence in methods and release, combined with accountability to Parliament rather than the executive.

2.4 Nothing to Spin Off CMF as Majority-Indian Company as ₹62,500 Crore Mobile Scheme Rewards Indian Brands

THE NEWS New Delhi. Carl Pei, co-founder and CEO of London-based smartphone maker Nothing, said in an open letter and a post on X that the company will spin off its CMF sub-brand into a standalone company incorporated and headquartered in India, majority owned by Indian shareholders, with its own team and research and development (R&D) in the country, The Indian Express and The Economic Times reported on Monday, September 21. A spin-off is when a company separates a unit into an independent company. Nothing will keep a stake and remain a shareholder and partner, supplying engineering expertise, its operating system, supplier relationships and global brand infrastructure. "CMF stops being a product line inside a London-based company and becomes an independent entity, incorporated in India, controlled in India and majority owned by Indian shareholders," Mr. Pei said, according to ET. CMF began as Nothing's budget sub-brand and drove the company's growth in India in 2025, after the sub-brand moved to India and set up a $100 million joint venture with the contract manufacturer Optiemus Electronics. The new company aims to make and sell 100 million phones a year. The announcement follows the government's notification of a new ₹62,500 crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme, which, The Indian Express reports, has two segments — one for mobile phone manufacturing and one for Indian brands. In the Indian-brand segment, eligible firms can get an incentive of 5% on eligible sales, an additional 3% linked to Indian design and R&D, and up to 1.5% more for domestic sourcing of key components and sub-assemblies. To qualify as an Indian brand, a company must be incorporated in India, hold its intellectual property (IP) and trademark in India, have management control with Indian citizens, have over 51% of its shares held by Indian citizens, and have in-house R&D and design capability in India. India manufactures almost all mobile phones sold domestically and is the world's second-largest maker by volume, IE notes, but has few successful domestic brands. Mr. Pei said 99% of phones sold in India are made in India, but "most of the underlying IP still sits offshore". He listed industrial design, camera systems, operating systems, antennas and co-engineering of displays, chipsets and camera modules as "real R&D". The syllabus link is GS3 on industrial policy and the effects of liberalisation on industry.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

PLI and earlier schemes make India the world's second-largest phone maker by volume → value stays offshore because design and IP belong to foreign brands → government notifies a ₹62,500 crore scheme with a separate segment rewarding Indian-owned brands, Indian IP and R&D → foreign brands restructure to qualify, starting with Nothing spinning off CMF as a majority-Indian company → the test becomes whether R&D and IP actually move to India

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Production Linked Incentives pay for output, not for setting up —** A Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme pays a firm a percentage of its incremental sales of goods made in India above a base year, instead of subsidising investment upfront. The first PLI scheme, for large-scale electronics manufacturing including mobile phones, was notified in April 2020 and was later extended to 14 sectors. Because the incentive follows sales, the government pays only when production happens. Its known limitation is that it rewards assembly volume rather than domestic value addition unless the conditions say otherwise.

2. **Value addition, not assembly, is the measure of industrial depth —** Domestic value addition is the share of a product's value created within the country — through design, components, software and branding — as opposed to imported parts assembled locally. The 'smile curve' in industrial economics shows that the highest value lies at the two ends of production, R&D and design at one end and brand and marketing at the other, while assembly in the middle earns the least. A country can make every phone it sells and still capture a small share of the value if the IP and the brand belong to others.

3. **Intellectual property ownership is what the 'Indian brand' test targets —** Intellectual property includes patents, trademarks, industrial designs and copyright. In India these are governed by the Patents Act, 1970, the Trade Marks Act, 1999, the Designs Act, 2000 and the Copyright Act, 1957, and administered by the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks. Where IP is registered and owned determines where licensing income and much of the profit is booked, which is why a scheme that requires IP and trademarks to be held in India goes to the heart of value

	capture. 4. **Foreign ownership rules shape who counts as Indian —** Foreign direct investment in India is regulated under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 and the government's consolidated FDI policy. Press Note 3 of 2020 requires prior government approval for any investment from an entity of a country that shares a land border with India. A requirement that over 51% of shares be held by Indian citizens, with management control in Indian hands, therefore defines an Indian brand by ownership and control, not by the location of the factory.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 asks about industrial policy and Make in India —** Mains questions have asked about the effectiveness of PLI schemes and whether India can move from assembly to manufacturing depth. A scheme that rewards Indian IP and design is a clear new development for such answers. 2. **Entrepreneurship as a factor of production is under-examined —** Most answers treat industrial policy as a question of capital and labour. This story is about entrepreneurship and IP ownership — who takes risk, who owns the brand — and allows a more sophisticated answer on value capture. 3. **Prelims tests scheme design and IP law —** UPSC has asked about PLI sectors, the laws governing IP and the concept of value addition. The criteria for an Indian brand under this scheme are suitable for statement-based questions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• A Production Linked Incentive scheme pays incentives on incremental sales of domestically manufactured goods over a base year, rather than on the amount of investment. • The first PLI scheme, notified in 2020, covered large-scale electronics manufacturing including mobile phones. • Trademarks in India are governed by the Trade Marks Act, 1999, and industrial designs by the Designs Act, 2000. • Press Note 3 of 2020 requires prior government approval for foreign direct investment from entities of countries sharing a land border with India. • Domestic value addition refers to the share of a product's value that is created within the country, as distinct from the value of imported components. • Foreign direct investment in India is regulated under the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.
ANALYSIS	1. **The scheme shifts the question from where phones are made to who owns them —** The earlier PLI succeeded in its own terms: India assembles almost every phone it sells and is the second-largest maker by volume. But the profit on design, software and brand still went abroad, so the incentive paid largely for assembly. The new Indian-brand segment, with an extra 3% for Indian design and R&D, pays for exactly what the smile curve says is valuable. It is industrial policy moving from the labour factor to the entrepreneurship factor. 2. **Nothing's move shows the scheme is working, and the risk of it being gamed —** Within days of notification, a foreign brand has restructured its budget line into a majority-Indian company. That is the intended response. But the partnership model — Nothing supplying engineering, the operating system and supply chains — means much of the core IP could still sit with the parent. If the Indian entity licenses technology from abroad, it could qualify on paper while value continues to flow out as royalties. Verification of where IP is actually created will decide whether this is transformation or relabelling.

	3. **Indian ownership rules may pull Chinese brands into the same restructuring —** The largest phone brands in India are foreign, many of them Chinese, and Press Note 3 already limits Chinese investment. A 51% Indian shareholding requirement offers a path for such brands to form Indian-controlled entities with Indian partners. This could strengthen domestic firms, but it could also create nominal Indian fronts. Strict tests of management control and IP location are essential, and the counter-view is that too strict a test will simply exclude the firms with the technology India needs. 4. **Scale is the argument for incentives, but also the trap —** Mr. Pei's case for India is scale: selling 100 million phones a year would give CMF the power to shape supply chains and pull component makers into India. That is how Chinese brands built their ecosystems. But global smartphone markets are mature and dominated by a few large brands, so a new brand may struggle to reach such volumes. Incentives calibrated to sales reward the winners but cannot create the winning product; that depends on the quality of engineering talent, which is where India's labour factor becomes decisive. 5. **The fiscal cost needs an exit plan —** An incentive of 5% plus 3% plus up to 1.5% on sales is generous, and ₹62,500 crore is a large commitment. The public case rests on the argument that it builds lasting capability, so the scheme must be time-bound and linked to measurable targets: patents filed, R&D staff employed, domestic content achieved. If the incentive becomes permanent, it turns from a catalyst into a subsidy that the sector depends on.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India has become a leading assembler of mobile phones but not yet a maker of global phone brands." In this context, examine how the design of industrial incentives can shift value addition towards R&D, design and intellectual property. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Note that India manufactures almost all phones sold domestically and is the world's second-largest producer by volume, but that most IP remains offshore, and cite the new ₹62,500 crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme. 2. **Body — why assembly is not enough —** Explain the smile curve and domestic value addition, and why the original PLI of 2020 rewarded volume. Link to the difference between labour-intensive assembly and entrepreneurship-intensive design. 3. **Body — the new design —** Explain the Indian-brand segment: 5% on eligible sales, 3% linked to Indian design and R&D, up to 1.5% for domestic sourcing, and the criteria of incorporation, IP and trademark in India, Indian management control and over 51% Indian shareholding. Use the CMF spin-off as an example. 4. **Body — risks and safeguards —** Discuss relabelling, royalty outflows, Chinese-brand fronts and fiscal cost. Suggest verification of IP creation, time-bound incentives, R&D milestones and university-industry linkages. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India's next industrial step is to own what it makes, and that incentives will succeed only if they are tied to capability rather than labels.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT. A brand applies as an 'Indian brand' but licenses its operating system from its foreign parent. How do you assess it?** ***Approach:*** I would check the formal criteria — incorporation, shareholding, management control, IP and trademark registration in India — and then the substance: where the engineers who develop the products work and who owns new patents. A licensed operating system need not disqualify a firm, since many brands use licensed software, but the additional 3% for Indian design and R&D should be paid only on evidence of Indian design. I would set up an independent technical audit rather than rely on self-declaration.

Q2. As a District Collector in an electronics manufacturing cluster, how do you help local firms benefit?

Approach: I would map the component suppliers in the district and connect them with brand owners that now have an incentive to source domestically. I would work with the State's industrial agency on land, power and approvals, and with local engineering colleges on skill courses in design and testing. I would also track workplace safety and labour conditions in factories, since scale-up often strains them. The aim is to make the district a supplier of parts and skills, not only of assembly labour.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it right for the state to decide which companies count as 'Indian'?

Approach: Governments routinely define eligibility for public money, and a scheme meant to build Indian capability must define what that means. The danger is protectionism that shelters weak firms or excludes foreign partners with technology. The best definitions focus on activity — R&D, IP creation, domestic sourcing — rather than only on the nationality of shareholders. Clear, objective criteria applied equally to all firms keep such a scheme fair.

2.5 Rangarajan and Shanmugam: Tamil Nadu's $1.5 Trillion Target Needs 12.2% Real Growth; 2038-39 More Likely

THE NEWS Tamil Nadu. In an op-ed in The Hindu, C. Rangarajan, former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and former RBI Governor, and K.R. Shanmugam, former Director of the Madras School of Economics, test the arithmetic behind Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's goal, announced at the NITI Aayog meeting on June 11, 2026, of making Tamil Nadu a $1.5 trillion economy by 2035-36. Tamil Nadu's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), the State-level equivalent of GDP, was ₹35.29 lakh crore in 2025-26. To reach $1.5 trillion in 10 years, it must rise 4.9-fold to ₹172.56 lakh crore by 2035-36, assuming the dollar appreciates by 2% a year against the rupee to ₹115.38. That requires nominal growth of 17.2% and, with 5% inflation, real growth of 12.2% every year for a decade. Tamil Nadu's real growth has exceeded 12% in only three years: 13.96% in 2005-06, 15.21% in 2006-07 and 13.12% in 2010-11. At 17.2% nominal growth, per capita income would rise from $4,808 to $19,157, above the $16,383 that the writers estimate as the developed-country norm, extrapolated from World Bank cut-offs. At 15% nominal (10% real), the target is reached in 2037-38 and developed status in 2036-37. The State grew 10.3% a year in real terms between 2005-06 and 2011-12 against 8.2% for India, fell to 6.98% (India 6.96%) between 2012-13 and 2018-19, and recovered to 9.1% (India 8.1%) between 2021-22 and 2025-26; at that pace, with nominal growth of 14.1%, the target arrives in 2038-39. The earlier one-trillion-dollar-by-2030 goal would be met in 2033-34 or 2034-35 depending on the scenario. Sustaining 10% real growth needs an investment rate of 40% of GSDP, assuming an Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) — the units of capital needed to produce one additional unit of output — of 4, which itself needs better use of capital. With 14% nominal growth, a fiscal deficit below 3% would stabilise the debt-GSDP ratio at around 23%. The authors conclude that the most likely path is 14% nominal growth, reaching $1.5 trillion by 2038-39. The syllabus link is GS3 on growth, investment and fiscal federalism.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Tamil Nadu grows faster than India in 2005-12, slows to the national average in 2012-19, recovers to 9.1% after 2021 → Chief Minister sets a $1.5 trillion target for 2035-36 at the NITI Aayog meeting in June 2026 → arithmetic shows it needs 12.2% real growth for 10 years, achieved only thrice before → realistic 9-10% real growth needs a 40% investment rate at an ICOR of 4 and fiscal discipline → most likely date becomes 2038-39

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The ICOR links investment to growth in a single ratio** — The Incremental Capital Output Ratio is the additional capital needed to produce one additional unit of output. In the Harrod–Domar model, the growth rate equals the investment rate divided by the ICOR, so with an ICOR of 4, an investment rate of 40% of output yields 10% growth. A lower ICOR means capital is used more efficiently. The model underpinned India's early Five-Year Plans and remains a quick test of whether a growth target is consistent

	with savings and investment. 2. **Nominal and real growth are separated by inflation, and dollar targets by the exchange rate —** Nominal growth measures the change in output at current prices; real growth removes the effect of inflation. A target stated in dollars also depends on the exchange rate, so rupee depreciation raises the rupee growth needed to hit the same dollar figure. This is why the authors state their assumptions of 5% inflation and a 2% annual appreciation of the dollar explicitly. Any target stated in dollars is really three targets: real growth, inflation and the exchange rate. 3. **State borrowing is bounded by the Constitution and fiscal rules —** Article 293 of the Constitution governs borrowing by States; under Article 293(3), a State that owes money to the Centre needs the Centre's consent to raise new loans. Finance Commissions have generally recommended a fiscal deficit ceiling of 3% of GSDP for States, and States have enacted their own Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management laws. The debt-GSDP ratio stabilises when nominal growth is high enough relative to the deficit, which is why the authors pair 14% nominal growth with a deficit below 3%. 4. **Developed status is measured by per capita income thresholds —** The World Bank classifies economies into low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high income groups using gross national income per capita in U.S. dollars by the Atlas method, and revises the thresholds every July. 'High income' is commonly used as the marker of a developed country. Viksit Bharat 2047 is the national goal of India becoming a developed country by the centenary of Independence. The authors project the threshold forward from past trends to estimate a cut-off of about $16,383 for 2035-36.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS3 asks about growth, investment and inclusive development —** Questions have asked about the savings-investment gap, the capital efficiency of Indian growth and what it takes to become a developed economy. The ICOR arithmetic from this op-ed is a precise tool for such answers. 2. **Competitive federalism is an established GS2 theme —** States setting their own trillion-dollar targets reflect competitive federalism promoted through NITI Aayog. Answers on the role of States in Viksit Bharat 2047 can use Tamil Nadu as an example of both ambition and constraint. 3. **Prelims asks basic macro concepts —** ICOR, nominal versus real growth, GSDP and the fiscal deficit are classic Prelims concepts. The examiner often tests whether a higher ICOR means more or less efficient use of capital.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Incremental Capital Output Ratio measures the additional capital required to produce one additional unit of output; a lower ICOR indicates more efficient use of capital. • In the Harrod–Domar model, the growth rate of output equals the investment rate divided by the incremental capital output ratio. • Under Article 293(3) of the Constitution, a State that owes money to the Government of India needs the Centre's consent to raise a new loan. • Gross State Domestic Product is the value of all final goods and services produced within the geographical boundaries of a State in a given period. • The World Bank classifies countries by income group on the basis of gross national income per capita calculated by the Atlas method. • Real growth is approximately equal to nominal growth minus the rate of inflation.

ANALYSIS	1. **The target fails not on ambition but on arithmetic —** The authors do not say Tamil Nadu cannot grow fast; they show that 12.2% real growth for 10 years has no precedent in its history, which has seen such rates in only three isolated years. A target that requires sustained record performance sets up a political narrative of failure. A target of 2038-39 at 14% nominal growth is still ambitious and more credible. Credible targets anchor investor expectations; implausible ones are discounted by markets and become slogans. 2. **Capital, not intent, is the binding constraint —** A 40% investment rate is very high even by Indian standards and would have to be financed by domestic savings, flows from the rest of India and foreign investment. That puts the capital factor of production at the centre. It also means Tamil Nadu competes with other States for the same investment, which is why the authors stress an investment-friendly environment. Individual large projects, however high-profile, do not add up to 40% of GSDP on their own. 3. **Efficiency is the cheaper path to growth —** If the ICOR could be lowered from 4 to, say, 3.5, the same growth would need less investment. That depends on reliable power, faster approvals, good logistics and skilled labour, which are within the State's control. Tamil Nadu's large manufacturing base and educated workforce give it an advantage here. The counter-view is that capital efficiency tends to fall as economies move into capital-intensive sectors like semiconductors and heavy industry, so the ICOR may rise rather than fall. 4. **Fiscal discipline is the condition the target cannot skip —** The authors tie 14% nominal growth to a deficit below 3% so that debt stabilises at around 23% of GSDP. A State tempted to spend its way to a target through borrowing would raise its debt and interest bill, crowding out the very capital spending it needs. Welfare commitments compete for the same budget. The lesson for every State with a trillion-dollar goal is that growth targets and fiscal rules must be set together. 5. **Developed status is a moving target and a narrow definition —** The developed-country per capita norm rises every year, so reaching it in 2036-37 or 2037-38 depends on where the threshold is by then. More important, a per capita average says nothing about distribution between Chennai and the southern and western districts, or between formal and informal workers. For a Hindi-medium aspirant, the key point is that a dollar income figure is a necessary but not sufficient measure of development; human development and inequality measures complete the picture.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"A growth target is only as credible as the investment, capital efficiency and fiscal discipline behind it." Evaluate this statement with reference to Tamil Nadu's goal of becoming a $1.5 trillion economy. What role should States play in achieving Viksit Bharat 2047? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the goal announced at the NITI Aayog meeting on June 11, 2026, and the GSDP of ₹35.29 lakh crore in 2025-26, and that reaching $1.5 trillion by 2035-36 needs 12.2% real growth for 10 years. 2. **Body — the arithmetic —** Explain nominal and real growth and the exchange-rate assumption, the historical record of only three years above 12%, and the alternative scenarios reaching the target in 2037-38 or 2038-39. 3. **Body — the requirements —** Explain the ICOR of 4 and a 40% investment rate for 10% growth, sources of financing, a fiscal deficit below 3% and a debt-GSDP ratio of around 23%, and what the State can do to lower the ICOR. 4. **Body — role of States —** Discuss competitive federalism, State control over land, labour administration, power and urban infrastructure, and the need for fiscal

	responsibility, citing Article 293 limits on State borrowing. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that States are the engines of Viksit Bharat, but that targets should be based on transparent arithmetic and measured also by distribution and human development.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Finance Secretary of Tamil Nadu. The Chief Minister wants a plan to meet the $1.5 trillion target by 2035-36. What do you advise?** ***Approach:*** I would present the arithmetic honestly: the target needs 12.2% real growth sustained for a decade, which the State has never done. I would propose a plan built on raising the investment rate and lowering the ICOR, with milestones every year, and a fiscal path that keeps the deficit below 3%. I would suggest that the public target be framed as a trajectory, with 2038-39 as the realistic date, so that the government is judged on progress rather than on a date it cannot control. **Q2. As a District Collector in an industrial district, how would you contribute to raising the State's investment rate?** ***Approach:*** I would focus on what slows investment on the ground: land records, conversion permissions, utility connections and inspection delays. I would set up a single-window cell with timelines and publish its performance. I would also work with training institutions to supply skilled workers that investors need. Small reductions in delay across many projects lower the ICOR more reliably than a few large announcements. **Q3. An interview board asks: are trillion-dollar targets useful or just slogans?** ***Approach:*** Targets can mobilise administrations and signal ambition to investors, and a clear number focuses attention. They become slogans when they are not tied to the investment, efficiency and fiscal conditions needed to reach them. The Rangarajan–Shanmugam analysis shows how to make a target useful: state the assumptions, show the required growth and check it against history. A useful target also measures what matters to citizens, such as jobs and incomes, and not only the size of the economy.

3. Agriculture & Food

Today's farm stories are about protection, and about how thin it can be. Maharashtra is racing to declare a drought so that relief money can flow, but the rules it must follow were written for slower, surer disasters. The fertiliser factories that should be stocking up for the rabi season are producing less for the sixth month running, because the gas and sulphur they run on are caught in a war far away. And the trade agreement with New Zealand shows that India's most reliable protection for farmers is still the one it negotiates at the border. Farmers carry the weather risk, the input risk and the market risk at once; policy is judged by how much of that it takes off their shoulders.

3.1 Maharashtra Readies a 100% Drought Declaration as Rain Stays Away for 20 Days in 83 Talukas

THE NEWS Mumbai. Maharashtra Cooperation Minister Babasaheb Patil said on Monday, September 21, that the BJP-led Mahayuti government will soon declare "100% drought" in the State, The Hindu reports. "In my entire life, I have never seen such a severe drought," he said, adding that all crops, including soya bean, cotton and sugarcane, have suffered and that the declaration is expected by the end of September "based on the National Disaster Response Fund norms". The paper does not define "100% drought"; it appears to mean a declaration covering the affected areas in full rather than a partial finding, but readers should treat the term as the Minister's own. The statement matters because it is the first time a Minister has spoken of such a declaration; so far the government's official position has been that crop-damage surveys and ground verification would be done after October 5. According to the State Agriculture Department, rainfall has been absent for over 20 days in at least 83 talukas (sub-districts) across 20 districts, and at least six districts, including Amravati, Solapur and Latur, have a rainfall deficit of 40–50%. Water tankers have started plying in villages such as Naichakur in Dharashiv district. The government has announced relief such as fee waivers for students, electricity bill waivers and tanker deployment. A September 16 circular of the State Soil and Water Conservation Department instructs districts to revive existing water sources and build village supply networks instead of treating tankers as the first solution; the Groundwater Surveys and Development Agency will identify villages with drinking water shortage and send the list to District Collectorates by October. Collectors must submit plans for October–December by November 15, for January–March 2027 by December 20, and for April–June 2027 by January 20. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the State would not wait for Central assistance, and that a formal crop-loss assessment would be carried out after October 5 "as required under the rules", after which the State would seek help from the Centre. A separate Hindu brief, citing PTI, says the West India Sugar Mills Association (WISMA) expects Maharashtra's sugar production to fall by nearly 20% in the coming crushing season because of the rain shortfall. The syllabus link is drought management, disaster finance and rainfed agriculture.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Monsoon breaks for over 20 days across 83 talukas in 20 districts → soya bean, cotton and sugarcane wither and rainfall deficits reach 40–50% in districts such as Latur and Solapur → tankers start plying and the State announces fee and power-bill waivers → Minister promises a 100% drought declaration by September-end while the formal crop-loss survey waits till after October 5 → declaration opens the path to SDRF relief and an NDRF memorandum to the Centre, as sugar output is forecast to fall about 20%

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Drought is declared by the State, through a two-trigger test —** Under the Manual for Drought Management (updated 2020), as retrieved from its published text, the first trigger is a mandatory rainfall indicator — rainfall deviation, the Standardised Precipitation Index or a dry spell. The second trigger uses impact indicators from agriculture (such as sown area), remote sensing (vegetation indices such as NDVI), soil moisture and hydrology (reservoirs, groundwater, streamflow). Drought is 'severe' if at least two of three chosen impact indicators are severe and one moderate, and 'moderate' if at least two are moderate. The manual then requires ground truthing in 10% of affected villages chosen at random; crop loss of 33% or more supports a declaration, and more than 50% supports a finding of severe drought. 2. **The manual fixes deadlines and a path to central help —** The manual, as retrieved, says a kharif drought should be declared not later than October 31 and a rabi drought by March 31. After declaration, the State submits a memorandum for assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund within a week, and the Department of Agriculture

	and Farmers Welfare sends an Inter-Ministerial Central Team to assess the situation. Unlike most disasters, which the Ministry of Home Affairs handles, drought is managed at the Centre by the Agriculture Ministry because it is slow-onset and tied to cropping. 3. **SDRF and NDRF are statutory funds under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 —** Section 46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for the National Disaster Response Fund and Section 48 for the State Disaster Response Fund. On the Fifteenth Finance Commission's design, the Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF for general-category States and 90% for north-eastern and Himalayan States. Drought is one of the notified disasters eligible for assistance, and the NDRF supplements the SDRF only in disasters of severe nature. Relief is paid according to norms of assistance issued by the Centre, not as compensation for full loss. 4. **Input subsidy, not compensation, is what a farmer receives —** The SDRF/NDRF norms for 2022-23 to 2025-26, as published in a State government copy retrieved for this card, provide an agricultural input subsidy where crop loss exceeds 33%: ₹8,500 per hectare in rainfed areas, ₹17,000 per hectare in assured-irrigation areas and ₹22,500 per hectare for perennial crops, limited to 2 hectares per farmer. The same norms provide ₹4 lakh ex gratia for a death. The input subsidy is meant to help a farmer sow the next crop, which is why it is far smaller than the value of the lost harvest.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Drought and disaster management are named in GS3 —** The GS3 syllabus lists disaster and disaster management and also major crops, cropping patterns and irrigation. Mains has repeatedly asked about drought-proofing, water management and the vulnerability of rainfed agriculture, and a live case with a rainfall deficit, a groundwater plan and a relief timeline gives an answer both structure and evidence. 2. **Prelims tests the funds and the Act —** Statement questions on which Section creates the NDRF, who contributes to the SDRF, which ministry handles drought and what the 33% crop-loss threshold means are standard. The Manual's deadlines for kharif and rabi declarations are a less obvious but fair target. 3. **El Niño years make drought a predictable exam theme —** El Niño was covered last week, and a failing monsoon in the Deccan is the domestic face of the same climate story. Examiners like questions that link a global climate driver to State-level administrative response, and this case supports that link directly.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The National Disaster Response Fund is constituted under Section 46, and the State Disaster Response Fund under Section 48, of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. • Drought management at the Centre is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, not the Ministry of Home Affairs. • The Manual for Drought Management uses a mandatory rainfall indicator as the first trigger and impact indicators on agriculture, remote sensing, soil moisture and hydrology as the second. • The drought manual requires ground truthing in 10% of affected villages chosen at random before a declaration. • Under the SDRF/NDRF norms, an agricultural input subsidy is payable where crop loss exceeds 33%, up to a ceiling of 2 hectares per farmer. • Under the drought manual, a kharif drought is to be declared not later than October 31. • A taluka is an administrative sub-division of a district, used in States such as Maharashtra for revenue and development administration.

ANALYSIS	1. **The Minister is ahead of the rules, and that creates a legal problem —** The drought manual requires ground truthing and a crop-loss finding before a declaration, and the Chief Minister himself says the formal assessment will take place after October 5 as required by the rules. A declaration by September-end on political assurance alone would sit awkwardly with that process and could weaken the State's NDRF memorandum when the central team checks it. The more defensible route is to declare quickly on the rainfall and impact triggers and complete ground truthing rapidly, so that both speed and procedure are satisfied. 2. **The best part of the response is the water circular, not the waivers —** Fee waivers and electricity bill waivers are visible and popular, but they do little for the next six months of water stress. The September 16 circular, which asks Collectors to revive existing sources and plan quarter by quarter until June 2027 with GSDA data, treats drought as a long event rather than a one-time relief handout. It also explicitly discourages treating tankers as the first solution — a quiet admission that tanker supply has often been expensive, poorly monitored and prone to leakage. 3. **Input subsidy norms under-compensate the farmers most exposed —** A rainfed farmer receives ₹8,500 per hectare under the norms, for up to 2 hectares, while the cost of cultivating soya bean or cotton is several times that. The norms are designed to fund the next sowing, not to replace income, and crop insurance is meant to fill the rest. But where insurance coverage is thin and claims are slow, the gap falls on the farmer, which is why drought in Marathwada and Vidarbha is so often followed by debt stress. 4. **Sugarcane's thirst makes the drought worse and costs the sugar economy —** WISMA's forecast of a nearly 20% fall in Maharashtra's sugar output shows that the drought is not only a farmer's crisis but an industrial one, affecting mills, cooperatives and ethanol blending. Sugarcane is one of the most water-intensive crops, and its large area in water-scarce regions of the State has long been criticised. The counter-view is that cane is the most reliable income crop for many farmers because of the assured Fair and Remunerative Price. A drought year is the moment to push drip irrigation and diversification, when the cost of the current pattern is most visible. 5. **Not waiting for the Centre is good politics and sound administration —** The Chief Minister's promise not to wait for central assistance is correct in principle, since the SDRF exists precisely so that States can act first. Central assistance under the NDRF comes only after a memorandum and a central team's visit, which takes weeks. The test will be whether the SDRF has enough unspent balance and whether relief reaches farmers before the rabi sowing decision, which is when an input subsidy is actually useful.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In India, drought is declared by rule but experienced by the season." With reference to the current dry spell in Maharashtra, examine the process of drought declaration and relief under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the Manual for Drought Management, and suggest reforms to make drought response faster and more farmer-centred. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the facts: no rain for over 20 days in at least 83 talukas across 20 districts, deficits of 40–50% in districts such as Amravati, Solapur and Latur, tankers in Dharashiv, and a promised '100% drought' declaration by September-end. 2. **Body — the process —** Explain the manual's two triggers, the severe and moderate categories, 10% ground truthing and the 33% loss threshold; the October 31 deadline for kharif declaration; the SDRF and NDRF under Sections 48 and 46; the memorandum and Inter-Ministerial Central Team; and input subsidy norms. 3. **Body — the gaps —** Point out the tension between political urgency and procedural

	sequencing, the small size of input subsidies relative to cultivation costs, slow insurance claims, dependence on tankers, and the water-intensive cropping pattern shown by the forecast 20% fall in sugar output. 4. **Body — reforms —** Suggest satellite- and soil-moisture-based early declaration with rapid digital ground truthing, direct transfer of input subsidy before rabi sowing, integration with crop insurance claims, quarter-wise drinking water plans as in the September 16 circular, and incentives for drip irrigation and crop diversification away from cane in dry regions. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that drought management must move from relief after loss to risk management before it, since in a warming climate dry spells will be more frequent and the monsoon less forgiving.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Collector of Dharashiv. Tankers are already plying, and the State has asked for a water plan by November 15. What are your first steps?** ***Approach:*** I would get the GSDA list of shortage villages as early as possible and verify it with block officials and gram panchayats. For each village I would first examine existing sources — wells, borewells and small tanks that can be repaired or desilted — before approving tankers. Where tankers are necessary, I would fix GPS tracking and publish routes and schedules so that villagers can report missed trips, and I would prioritise cattle camps and fodder where livestock are at risk. **Q2. As the Agriculture Commissioner, how would you conduct crop-loss assessment quickly without compromising accuracy?** ***Approach:*** I would combine satellite vegetation indices and soil moisture data to identify the worst-hit areas and use them to choose ground-truthing villages as the manual requires. Field teams with mobile apps could record geotagged photographs and crop-cutting data, uploaded the same day. Transparent publication of results by village would reduce disputes and allow input subsidy to be credited directly to farmers' bank accounts before rabi sowing. **Q3. An interview board asks: should governments announce drought before the formal assessment is complete?** ***Approach:*** A government should signal early that it recognises the distress, because delay damages trust and farmers make sowing and borrowing decisions in real time. But the formal declaration should rest on the criteria in the manual, since it triggers public spending and a claim on the Centre. The right approach is to begin relief under the SDRF immediately and complete the formal process quickly, so that compassion and accountability move together.

3.2 Fertiliser Output Shrinks 12.4% in August, Sixth Straight Fall, as Gas and Sulphur Shortages Bite

THE NEWS New Delhi. Fertiliser production contracted for the sixth consecutive month, declining 12.4% year-on-year in August compared with an 8% contraction in July, according to the core-sector data released on Monday, September 21, The Economic Times reports. The core sector is a set of basic industries — now nine, including coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement, electricity and, newly, iron ore — whose combined output is tracked each month; the Express notes the data is released by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. Overall core-sector growth eased to a three-month low of 4.8% in August, from 5% in July and 6.2% in August 2025. August is the third release under the revised index with 2022-23 as the base year, replacing 2011-12. Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda, attributed the fall in fertiliser output to the slowdown in the sowing season and higher imports. Devendra Pant, chief economist at India Ratings and Research, said "supply-side issues, ie, reduction of gas supply and high energy cost, have been adversely impacting fertiliser production, following the West Asia conflict outbreak". Natural gas production declined 4.9% in August, coal 3.8% and crude oil 3.6%, while cement grew 12.5% and electricity 11.6%. The core sector carries a 40.27% weight in the Index of Industrial Production. The Indian Express editorial today explains why fertilisers are exposed. Sulphur recovered at refineries and gas plants is converted into sulphuric acid, which is needed to turn rock phosphate into water-soluble single super phosphate, di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and other phosphorus-bearing complex fertilisers. Sulphur, which India imported at $200 or less per tonne in normal times, now costs $1,000 and above, because attacks on energy infrastructure in Russia and the Persian Gulf have knocked out refining capacity. The editorial says India has managed to import enough urea and liquefied natural gas for domestic urea production, but that imports and domestic manufacture of phosphatic and complex fertilisers have been "severely constrained". An opinion article in The Economic Times adds that gas-to-urea fertiliser spreads are already at five to ten times their regular values and could rise further, hurting India's subsidy bill. The syllabus link is agricultural inputs, subsidies and energy security. The sulphur price surge was carded on September 21; the new development is the production data.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

West Asia conflict and strikes on Russian and Gulf energy infrastructure knock out refining capacity → sulphur rises from about $200 to over $1,000 a tonne and gas supply tightens with LNG spreads at 5–10 times normal → phosphatic and complex fertiliser manufacture is constrained and imports rise → fertiliser output falls for the sixth straight month, by 12.4% in August → rabi sowing approaches with pressure on DAP availability and on the subsidy bill

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The Index of Core Industries is a monthly lead indicator for industry —** The Index of Core Industries is compiled by the Office of the Economic Adviser in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade and released about a month after the reference month, before the Index of Industrial Production. The Economic Times reports that its base year has been revised to 2022-23 from 2011-12 and that iron ore has been added, making nine industries. The core industries together carry a weight of 40.27% in the IIP, so a slowdown in them usually foreshadows weaker industrial growth. 2. **Urea and phosphatic fertilisers are subsidised under two different regimes —** Urea is sold at a statutorily controlled maximum retail price, and the government pays manufacturers the difference between cost and that price, so a rise in gas cost raises the subsidy rather than the farm price. Phosphatic and potassic fertilisers such as DAP have been under the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme since April 1, 2010, under which a fixed subsidy is paid per kilogram of nutrient and retail prices are, in principle, open. The Department of Fertilizers in the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers administers both, and fertilisers are regulated under the Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985 issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. 3. **Natural gas is the feedstock for urea, sulphur the key for phosphates —** Urea is made by reacting ammonia, produced from natural gas, with carbon dioxide, so gas is both the fuel and the raw material. Phosphatic fertilisers need phosphoric acid, made by treating rock phosphate with sulphuric acid, which is why the price of sulphur, a refinery by-product, matters so much. India imports most of its rock phosphate and phosphoric acid and a large share of its DAP, making phosphatic supply more import-dependent than urea. 4. **Rabi demand for DAP peaks in October–November —** The rabi season's main crops, wheat, mustard and gram, are sown from October to December, and DAP is typically applied at sowing as a basal dose for phosphorus. Any shortfall in DAP stocks in October therefore affects sowing decisions directly. Farmers who cannot find DAP often switch to single super phosphate or complex fertilisers, or apply less phosphorus, with consequences for yields and soil nutrient balance.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Agricultural inputs and subsidies are named in GS3 —** The GS3 syllabus covers direct and indirect farm subsidies and issues related to the public distribution and supply of inputs. Fertiliser subsidies are one of the largest items of central subsidy, and Mains has asked about the imbalance in nutrient use and the reform of fertiliser pricing. 2. **Prelims asks about schemes and the index, not monthly growth —** Expect questions

on the Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme, the difference between urea and DAP pricing, neem-coated urea, the Index of Core Industries and which body compiles it. The August contraction figure itself is not examinable.

3. **Energy security and food security meet in this story —** The Express editorial's argument that the current crisis is about refineries and sulphur rather than crude oil gives candidates a fresh angle on energy security. A Mains answer that traces how a war in West Asia reaches a wheat field in Punjab through the price of sulphur is exactly the inter-linkage the examiner looks for.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Index of Core Industries is compiled and released by the Office of the Economic Adviser, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.
- The Nutrient Based Subsidy scheme for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers has been in force since April 1, 2010; urea is outside it and sold at a statutorily fixed maximum retail price.
- The Fertiliser (Control) Order, 1985 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.
- Natural gas is the principal feedstock for ammonia and hence for urea production in India.
- Sulphuric acid is used to convert rock phosphate into phosphoric acid and water-soluble phosphatic fertilisers such as single super phosphate and DAP.
- Di-ammonium phosphate contains 18% nitrogen and 46% phosphorus pentoxide.

ANALYSIS

1. **Six months of contraction is a supply problem, not a demand dip —** Mr. Sabnavis points to a slower sowing season and higher imports, which would suggest demand is simply being met from abroad. But six consecutive months of falling production, deepening from 8% to 12.4%, coinciding with a gas and sulphur crisis, fits Mr. Pant's supply-side explanation better. If the problem were only seasonal demand, production would not keep falling as the rabi season approaches. Both views can be partly right: domestic plants are squeezed by cost, and imports fill some of the gap at a higher price.

2. **Urea is protected by the subsidy design; DAP is not —** Because urea's retail price is fixed and the government absorbs cost increases, farmers are insulated from the gas shock, and the editorial says urea and LNG imports have been adequate. DAP is under a fixed per-nutrient subsidy, so when sulphur and phosphoric acid costs rise, either companies absorb losses, the government raises the subsidy, or supply shrinks. This asymmetry explains why the phosphatic segment is where the shortage appears first, and it also pushes farmers to overuse the cheaper nitrogen, worsening nutrient imbalance.

3. **The subsidy bill will rise, and the fiscal choice is political —** If gas-to-urea spreads are at five to ten times their regular values, as the Economic Times opinion article says, the cost of keeping urea prices unchanged rises steeply. The government can raise the subsidy, cut other spending, or pass on part of the cost; in practice it is unlikely to raise farm prices before or during a sowing season. The counter-view is that this crisis is temporary and that the fiscal cost is a price worth paying to protect food production, which is a reasonable position if the conflict ends soon.

4. **The crisis strengthens the case for domestic alternatives, but they are slow —** Nano fertilisers, organic manures, better use of domestic sulphur and phosphate sources, and precision application can reduce import dependence over time. None can replace basal DAP for this rabi season. The lesson is to build strategic reserves of key raw

	materials such as phosphoric acid and to diversify supply contracts before the next shock, since fertiliser is as strategic as crude oil for a country that feeds 140 crore people. 5. **The Maharashtra drought and the fertiliser squeeze compound each other —** Farmers who have lost kharif crops to drought enter the rabi season with less cash and must now face scarcer or costlier phosphatic fertiliser. Weak rural incomes and tight inputs together could reduce rabi area or yields in affected regions. Policy that treats drought relief and fertiliser supply as separate departments' problems will miss this interaction; timely input subsidy and priority allocation of DAP to drought-hit districts would address both.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's fertiliser security is a function of its energy security." In the light of the continued contraction in fertiliser production and the global shortage of sulphur and gas, examine the vulnerabilities of India's fertiliser sector and suggest measures to secure supplies for the rabi season and beyond. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the data: fertiliser output down 12.4% year-on-year in August, the sixth straight monthly fall, amid a West Asia conflict that has pushed sulphur above $1,000 a tonne and tightened gas supplies. 2. **Body — why the sector is exposed —** Explain gas as the feedstock for urea and sulphur as the key input for phosphatic fertilisers; import dependence for rock phosphate, phosphoric acid and DAP; and the different subsidy regimes for urea (fixed MRP) and DAP (Nutrient Based Subsidy). 3. **Body — consequences —** Discuss pressure on DAP availability before rabi sowing, nutrient imbalance as farmers overuse urea, a rising subsidy bill, and the compounding effect of drought in States such as Maharashtra. 4. **Body — measures —** Suggest strategic reserves of raw materials, long-term supply agreements and joint ventures abroad, recalibration of NBS rates, priority allocation to deficit and drought-hit districts, promotion of SSP and domestic sulphur recovery, soil-test-based application and gradual adoption of nano and organic alternatives. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that fertiliser should be treated as strategic infrastructure, planned with the same seriousness as crude oil reserves, because food security depends on it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Joint Director of Agriculture in a district before rabi sowing, and DAP stocks are short. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would get daily stock data from all retailers and cooperative societies through the fertiliser monitoring system and publish availability by block so that farmers do not travel from shop to shop. I would conduct inspections to prevent hoarding, black marketing and forced tagging of other products with DAP. I would also run a campaign on alternatives such as single super phosphate combined with urea and on soil-test-based doses, so that farmers do not skip phosphorus entirely. **Q2. As a Joint Secretary in the Department of Fertilizers, would you raise the Nutrient Based Subsidy rates mid-season?** ***Approach:*** If raw material costs have risen sharply and supply is falling, a mid-season revision may be necessary to keep companies importing and producing. I would base the revision on transparent cost data and make it time-bound, to be reviewed when prices ease. The alternative — letting DAP become scarce in the sowing season — would cost far more in lost output and farmer distress than the additional subsidy. **Q3. An interview board asks: should urea prices be raised to reduce overuse and the**

subsidy bill?

Approach: In principle, a very low urea price encourages overuse and damages soil health, so rationalising it is desirable. But raising prices in a year of drought and input shortages would hurt farmers at their weakest moment and could reduce production. The better path is to move gradually towards nutrient-based pricing with direct income support to farmers, announced well in advance and implemented in a normal year.

3.3 India–New Zealand FTA Enters Force on October 20, Keeping Dairy Out and Quota-Fencing Apples, Kiwis, Honey

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Free Trade Agreement between India and New Zealand, signed in New Delhi on April 27, will come into force on October 20, Vijaya Dashami, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and New Zealand's Trade Minister Todd McClay announced by video conference on Monday, September 21. New Zealand's Parliament passed the enabling law on September 16 by 93 votes to 29, the ET reports. The two sides aim to double bilateral trade in goods and services to about ₹35,000 crore in the "next four to five years". Mr. Goyal said India has kept its sensitive sectors outside the concessions — dairy and agricultural produce including onions, almonds, chickpeas, peas, artificial honey, corn and sugar. "Dairy we don't open for anyone," he said. A "calibrated market access" has been structured, the Commerce Ministry says, for New Zealand's apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey through tariff rate quotas (TRQs) with a minimum import price and seasonal import windows, alongside safeguards for domestic farmers. A TRQ means a fixed quantity may enter at a low or zero duty while imports above it pay the normal, higher duty; a minimum import price is a floor below which imports are not allowed; a seasonal window allows imports only in months when Indian produce is not in the market. The ET's graphic says kiwifruit gets duty-free access within a quota almost four times New Zealand's current exports, and tariffs on Manuka honey will be cut from 66% to 16.5% over five years. It also lists a 14-year bilateral safeguard mechanism, stricter rules of origin against third-country goods routed via New Zealand, and 5,000 Temporary Employment Entry visas with stays of up to three years. Indian goods will enter New Zealand duty-free across all tariff lines from day one. New Zealand gets tariff-free access for 57% of its exports initially, rising to 82% when fully phased in, and tariffs are eliminated or reduced on 95% of its exports by value, though an ET graphic separately puts day-one duty-free access at 54.11%. New Zealand has committed to facilitate $20 billion of investment in India over 15 years; Mr. Goyal cited kiwi farming and apiculture (beekeeping) for technology ties. Bilateral trade was $1.3 billion in 2024-25 according to The Hindu and about $2.4 billion in FY25 according to the ET; the papers do not explain the gap. The syllabus link is trade agreements, the WTO and farm protection.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India exits RCEP in 2019, with fears of dairy and farm imports from Australia and New Zealand → shifts to bilateral FTAs that exclude dairy, as with Australia → negotiations with New Zealand conclude, the pact is signed on April 27 and New Zealand's Parliament ratifies it on September 16 → India keeps dairy, onions, chickpeas and sugar out and admits apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey only through quotas, price floors and seasonal windows → agreement enters into force on October 20

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The WTO's Agreement on Agriculture rests on three pillars —** The Agreement on Agriculture, which came into force with the WTO in 1995, disciplines market access, domestic support and export competition. Under market access, non-tariff barriers were converted into tariffs (tariffication), and members were allowed to use tariff rate quotas to guarantee a minimum level of imports at lower duties. India's bound tariffs on many farm products are high, giving it room to protect sensitive products. A free trade agreement must, under GATT Article XXIV, cover substantially all trade between the parties, which is why sensitive lists are negotiated carefully.

2. **Tariff rate quotas, minimum import prices and safeguards are the tools of calibrated opening —** A tariff rate quota applies a lower in-quota tariff to a fixed volume and a higher out-of-quota tariff beyond it. A minimum import price prevents imports below a set floor, protecting domestic producers from very cheap supplies. A bilateral safeguard mechanism in an FTA allows a party to temporarily raise duties again if a

	surge in imports under the agreement causes or threatens serious injury to a domestic industry. Rules of origin determine how much processing must happen in the partner country for goods to qualify for concessional duty. 3. **Dairy is India's most guarded sector because of who depends on it —** India is the world's largest producer of milk, a position built on the cooperative model of Operation Flood launched in 1970 by the National Dairy Development Board under Verghese Kurien. The sector is dominated by small and marginal farmers and landless households, many of them women, for whom milk is a daily cash income. India walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in November 2019, with the threat of dairy imports from New Zealand and Australia among its concerns, and the India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement of 2022 also excluded dairy. 4. **Free trade agreements in India are negotiated by the Commerce Ministry and signed by the executive —** India's trade agreements are negotiated by the Department of Commerce and approved by the Union Cabinet; Parliament's approval is not constitutionally required, because treaty-making is an executive power exercised under Article 73, subject to Parliament's power to legislate on treaties under Article 253. In contrast, New Zealand needed legislation to give effect to the pact. India's recent agreements include those with the UAE (2022), Australia (2022), the EFTA countries (2024) and the United Kingdom.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Bilateral trade agreements are a GS2 and GS3 favourite —** GS2 covers bilateral and regional agreements affecting India's interests, and GS3 covers the effects of liberalisation on the economy. Questions have asked why India left RCEP and how FTAs affect domestic sectors, and an answer that cites the specific protection design of the New Zealand pact is stronger than one that speaks in generalities. 2. **Prelims tests trade vocabulary and WTO structure —** Terms such as tariff rate quota, minimum import price, rules of origin, safeguard, bound tariff and the three pillars of the Agreement on Agriculture are standard. The list of countries in India's FTAs and RCEP's membership are also regular targets. 3. **Farm protection in trade is a recurring interview theme —** Interview boards often ask whether India is too protectionist in agriculture. The New Zealand agreement shows a middle path — opening for fruits and honey India does not produce in sufficient quantity or season, while protecting dairy — that a candidate can cite.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The WTO Agreement on Agriculture, in force since 1995, rests on three pillars: market access, domestic support and export competition. • A tariff rate quota allows a specified quantity of imports at a lower tariff, with a higher tariff applied beyond that quantity. • Rules of origin determine whether a good qualifies as originating in a partner country and therefore for preferential tariffs under a trade agreement. • India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations in November 2019. • Operation Flood, launched in 1970 by the National Dairy Development Board, made India the world's largest milk producer. • GATT Article XXIV permits free trade areas as an exception to most-favoured-nation treatment, provided they cover substantially all trade between the parties.
ANALYSIS	1. **India has perfected a template: open the high-value niche, shut the mass market —**

Apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey are high-value products consumed mainly by urban, higher-income households, and India's own supply is either seasonal or limited. Opening them through quotas, price floors and seasonal windows lets consumers gain without undercutting Indian growers at harvest. Dairy, onions, chickpeas and sugar, by contrast, are mass products with crores of small producers, and they stay out. The same template was used with Australia, and it is likely to be India's standard offer to agricultural exporters.

2. **The minimum import price and seasonal window protect Himachal and Kashmir apple growers —** New Zealand's apple season falls in the southern hemisphere's autumn, which does not coincide with India's own harvest in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. A seasonal window allows imports only in months when Indian apples are scarce or come out of cold storage. A minimum import price prevents dumping of cheap fruit. Growers' bodies will still watch the quota volumes, because cold-stored Indian apples compete in the same off-season months.
3. **The gains for India are mostly in services and investment, not goods —** New Zealand is a small market, and bilateral trade of between $1.3 billion and $2.4 billion is modest. Duty-free access for Indian goods matters mainly for engineering goods, automobiles and pharmaceuticals, which already face only low tariffs. The larger gains are the 5,000 temporary employment visas, post-study work pathways and the commitment to facilitate $20 billion of investment, which should be read as a facilitation target rather than a guaranteed flow.
4. **Agricultural cooperation could matter more than market access —** Mr. Goyal's reference to kiwi farming and apiculture points to New Zealand's technological strengths in orchard management, dairy genetics and honey quality. India's kiwifruit production in the north-east and hill States, and its beekeeping sector under the National Beekeeping and Honey Mission, could benefit from technology partnerships. The counter-view is that such cooperation clauses are often weakly implemented, and without funded programmes they remain paper commitments.
5. **The dairy exclusion protects livelihoods but has a long-run cost —** Keeping dairy out protects small producers today, but it also shields the sector from competition that might push productivity, which remains low per animal compared with New Zealand. India's strategy relies on raising productivity through breed improvement and cooperatives before any opening. The risk is that protection becomes permanent without the productivity gains that would justify it; the test is whether the next decade narrows the gap.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

India's recent trade agreements open some agricultural markets while keeping dairy and staple crops protected. With reference to the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, examine the instruments used to balance market access with farmer protection, and assess whether this approach serves India's long-term agricultural interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction —** State the facts: the agreement signed on April 27 enters force on October 20; India has excluded dairy, onions, chickpeas, peas, almonds, artificial honey, corn and sugar, and has opened apples, kiwifruit and Manuka honey through TRQs with minimum import prices and seasonal windows.
2. **Body — the instruments —** Explain tariff rate quotas, minimum import prices, seasonal windows, the 14-year bilateral safeguard mechanism and stricter rules of origin, and relate them to the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture and GATT Article XXIV.
3. **Body — why this balance —** Discuss dairy's importance to small, landless and women producers, the RCEP exit of 2019, the Australia precedent of 2022, and the logic of opening high-value niches that do not compete in season with Indian produce.

	4. **Body — assessment —** Weigh consumer gains, technology cooperation in kiwi and apiculture, services and investment commitments, against the risk that permanent protection delays productivity reform in dairy and horticulture. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that calibrated opening is a sound interim strategy, provided protection is used as time to raise productivity rather than as a substitute for it.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Horticulture Director in Himachal Pradesh, apple growers fear the New Zealand agreement. What do you tell them and what do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would explain that New Zealand's apples can enter only within a quota, above a minimum import price and in a seasonal window, so they will not compete with the fresh harvest. I would ask the Commerce Ministry to share quota volumes and monitoring data and set up a mechanism to report any surge that could justify the safeguard. At the same time I would push investment in cold storage, grading and high-density orchards so that our growers compete on quality. **Q2. You are a trade negotiator. New Zealand asks for even a small dairy quota in a future review. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would restate that dairy is a livelihood sector for crores of small producers and that India has not opened it to any partner. I would explore cooperation instead — in dairy genetics, animal health and processing technology — that benefits New Zealand firms without imports. Any future discussion would need a detailed impact study and consultation with cooperatives and States before any change in India's position. **Q3. An interview board asks: is India too protectionist in agriculture?** ***Approach:*** India protects farm sectors where small producers are numerous and vulnerable, such as dairy and staples, and this is a defensible choice in a country where agriculture employs a large share of the workforce. It has opened niches where domestic supply is limited, as the New Zealand agreement shows. The fair criticism is not protection itself but the lack of a time-bound plan to raise productivity, so that protection can gradually be reduced as competitiveness improves.

4. International Relations

Every story in this section is about rules that exist on paper but have nobody willing to enforce them. The law of the sea gives ships a right of transit that Iran does not accept and the Houthis ignore, the UN Charter's right of self-defence is being claimed by Pakistan against Afghanistan and by Afghanistan against Pakistan, a Saudi–Pakistan–Türkiye pact promises collective defence that no member has ratified, and a new coalition of middle powers wants to repair the UN from outside the Security Council. For India, which depends on sea lanes it does not control and on a UN it cannot yet reform, the lesson is that rules survive only when someone pays to keep them.

4.1 With Hormuz Shut and Bab el-Mandeb Lost, Hindu Op-Ed Proposes a Malacca–Singapore Cooperative Mechanism

THE NEWS Persian Gulf and Red Sea. The Economic Times editorial "Oil's Sea Lanes Get Tougher to Navigate" says Yemen's Houthis are tightening their control over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait — the narrow mouth of the Red Sea between Yemen and the Horn of Africa — while Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz continues, so that both points of access to West Asian oil, through the Persian Gulf and through the Red Sea, are choked. A strait is a narrow natural sea passage joining two larger bodies of water; it becomes a chokepoint when closing it forces ships onto much longer routes. The ET notes that India buys around four-fifths of its oil from Russia and West Asia. Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE supply India through the Persian Gulf, while Russian cargoes use the Red Sea, which the Houthis are not blocking. Asia-bound tankers avoiding the Red Sea must sail around Africa, a four-week detour. In an ET op-ed, Ateesh Tankha writes that before February 28, when the war began, Hormuz carried about 20 million barrels per day (bpd), and that after its closure barely 2 million bpd trickled out; he says the little crude that got through recently paid a toll, and that the Houthis have bombed Saudi refineries and stalled Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline, known as Petroline. The Indian Express, citing Reuters from Dubai, reports that Yemeni government forces remain on the defensive after the loss of Bab el-Mandeb. In The Hindu, M. Kalyanaraman offers the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as a model. In 1971 Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore jointly challenged the idea that those straits were "international"; once Indonesia and Malaysia claimed 12-nautical-mile territorial seas, the zones met in the middle. The U.K. then introduced "transit passage", a right to cross "continuous and expeditious" that also covers warships, and in 2007 the three littoral states built a Cooperative Mechanism with an Aids to Navigation Fund paid by voluntary contributions, which "do not amount to tolls". Iran, which has not ratified UNCLOS, passed a law in 1993 requiring foreign warships to seek its authorisation. Iran and Oman have apparently agreed on a framework for reopening Hormuz, but the Strait has not reopened and the U.S. has not accepted the arrangement. The syllabus link is GS2 on the effect of other countries' policies on India's interests and GS3 on energy security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

West Asia war begins on February 28 → Iran blockades Hormuz, relying on its 1993 law and its non-ratification of UNCLOS → Houthis advance in Yemen, strike Saudi refineries and Petroline, and Yemeni government forces lose Bab el-Mandeb → both the Gulf and Red Sea routes to India are choked and Asia-bound tankers detour around Africa → an Iran–Oman framework stalls without U.S. acceptance, and a Hindu op-ed proposes the Malacca–Singapore Cooperative Mechanism as a template

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **UNCLOS creates graded rights of passage, and the strait regime is the strongest —** The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in 1982 and in force since 1994, lets a coastal state claim a territorial sea of up to 12 nautical miles under Article 3. In the territorial sea, foreign ships enjoy only innocent passage, which must not be prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal state, and Article 25(3) allows the coastal state to suspend it temporarily in specified areas for security reasons. Submarines in innocent passage must travel on the surface and show their flag under Article 20. In straits used for international navigation, Part III (Articles 37 to 44) provides transit passage, which covers ships and aircraft including warships and submarines, and Article 44 says it cannot be suspended. India ratified UNCLOS in 1995. 2. **Article 43 of UNCLOS is the legal hook for the Malacca model —** Article 43 says that user states and states bordering a strait should cooperate by agreement to establish and maintain navigational and safety aids and to prevent pollution from ships. The 2007 Cooperative Mechanism in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore was the first

	arrangement to put this article into practice, with a Cooperation Forum, a Project Coordination Committee and an Aids to Navigation Fund. Its design principle is that littoral states keep sovereignty and do not charge for passage, while users share the cost of safety. Separately, Article 26 allows charges on foreign ships in the territorial sea only for specific services rendered, not for passage as such. 3. **Two chokepoints guard the two exits of West Asian oil —** The Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran and the Musandam peninsula of Oman and links the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The Bab el-Mandeb lies between Yemen on the Arabian side and Djibouti and Eritrea on the African side, and links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden; with the Suez Canal it forms the shortest route between the Indian Ocean and Europe. The Strait of Malacca lies between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra and joins the Andaman Sea to the Strait of Singapore and the South China Sea. Archipelagic states such as Indonesia received a separate regime, archipelagic sea lanes passage, in Part IV of UNCLOS. 4. **India's buffers against a supply shock are limited by design —** India's strategic petroleum reserves are built by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd, a special purpose vehicle under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, in underground rock caverns at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur with a combined capacity of 5.33 million tonnes. These cover only a matter of days of national consumption, so India's real buffer is diversification of suppliers and routes. The Indian Navy has run Operation Sankalp since 2019 to escort Indian-flagged merchant ships in the Gulf region, and the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region at Gurugram shares maritime traffic information with partner navies.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Chokepoints and the law of the sea are recurring Prelims material —** UPSC has repeatedly asked map-based questions on straits and the water bodies they connect, and questions on maritime zones — territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone. The distinction between innocent passage and transit passage, and the question of which regime covers warships, is exactly the type of conceptual statement the examiner likes to test. 2. **Mains asks about energy security and the Indian Ocean as India's strategic space —** The GS2 syllabus names the "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests" and the Indian diaspora, and GS3 covers infrastructure including energy and security challenges in border areas and the seas. Questions on West Asian instability, the safety of sea lanes of communication and India's maritime diplomacy have appeared across years, and the present crisis supplies a live case for all of them. 3. **Earlier coverage treated oil as a price story; this is a routes story —** The U.S. tariff law against buyers of Russian oil was covered on 21 September and is not repeated here. The new development is the simultaneous closure of both West Asian exits and a concrete legal proposal for Hormuz. An answer that moves from price to route to law shows depth.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under Article 3 of UNCLOS, every state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles measured from the baselines. • The right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation, provided in Part III of UNCLOS, applies to all ships and aircraft including warships, and under Article 44 it cannot be suspended. • The right of innocent passage in the territorial sea may be temporarily suspended by the coastal state in specified areas if essential for its security,

	under Article 25(3) of UNCLOS. ● Article 43 of UNCLOS provides for cooperation between user states and states bordering a strait to establish navigational and safety aids and to prevent pollution from ships. ● The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, while the Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. ● The Strait of Malacca separates the Malay Peninsula from the Indonesian island of Sumatra and connects the Andaman Sea with the Strait of Singapore. ● India's strategic petroleum reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur are managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
ANALYSIS	1. **The Malacca parallel is technically exact and politically inverted —** Kalyanaraman is right that the geography matches: in both cases two territorial seas meet in the middle and leave no high-seas corridor. But the Malacca bargain was struck while UNCLOS itself was being negotiated, when Indonesia could trade acceptance of transit passage for recognition of its archipelagic waters. No such trade is on the table for Iran today, because the treaty is already written. More basically, the littoral states of Malacca were worried about groundings and oil spills; Iran is worried about being attacked. A fund for lighthouses and hydrographic surveys answers the first worry, not the second. The model can supply the machinery of a settlement, but not its political core. 2. **The toll is the real dispute, and the Malacca model is designed precisely to avoid one —** Tankha reports that the little crude that left Hormuz recently did so after paying a toll. A toll turns a right of passage into a permission, which is exactly what transit passage was invented to prevent; Article 26 of UNCLOS allows charges only for services rendered, not for passage. The Malacca fund solves this by separating the two ideas: users pay voluntarily for safety services, and nobody pays for the right to pass. Offering Iran a seat on a similar committee would give it a formal role and some legitimacy without the humiliation, for the user states, of paying a toll. The counter-view is serious: rewarding a state that closed a strait by force with a role in managing it could invite the same tactic elsewhere. 3. **Iran and the U.S. are both outside UNCLOS, which weakens the law at the one strait where it matters most —** Iran has signed but not ratified UNCLOS and argues that transit passage is a treaty right available only to parties, which is why its 1993 law demands authorisation from warships. The United States has not joined UNCLOS either, but treats transit passage as customary international law binding on everyone. The two principal antagonists at Hormuz therefore each invoke the law selectively. For India, a party since 1995, the principled position is the one it takes in the South China Sea: freedom of navigation under UNCLOS for all. Consistency on that point is a diplomatic asset India should not spend on short-term cargo deals. 4. **India is exposed on both routes and on both sides of the ledger —** The ET editorial's sharpest point is that disruption hits India harder than most because nearly all its crude imports and its exports of refined products move by sea. Gulf crude comes through Hormuz; refined products to Europe, which revived after the EU banned products made from Russian crude, go out through the Red Sea. Russian crude, the obvious substitute, faces the U.S. tariff threat. India's diversification has therefore been by supplier, not by route, and the present crisis shows the second matters as much as the first. A reserve of 5.33 million tonnes buys days, not months, of cover. 5. **India can be a convener of user states, but not their guarantor —** India is one of the largest users of both straits, has working relations with Iran through Chabahar and with Oman, and has escorted its merchant ships since 2019. That gives it standing to

	argue for a user-state cooperative mechanism for Hormuz on the Article 43 model, alongside Qatar, which the Hindu op-ed says has already mooted the idea. What India cannot do is make the United States accept an arrangement it has rejected, or make Iran give up its security demands. The realistic role is to keep the idea alive and ready for the day a ceasefire makes it usable.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Law gives ships a right of passage through international straits; power decides whether they can use it." In the light of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the Houthi advance at Bab el-Mandeb, examine the adequacy of the UNCLOS regime for straits used for international navigation. How can India protect its energy security and promote a cooperative solution? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the fact that both exits for West Asian oil, Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, are simultaneously disrupted, and that India buys around four-fifths of its oil from Russia and West Asia, almost all of it by sea. 2. **Body — the legal regime and its gaps —** Explain the 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, innocent passage and its suspension under Article 25(3), and transit passage under Part III, which cannot be suspended. Point out that Iran has not ratified UNCLOS and its 1993 law requires warships to seek authorisation, and that the U.S. is also outside the treaty, so enforcement depends on power, not procedure. 3. **Body — the Malacca–Singapore model —** Describe the 1971 joint position of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, the transit passage compromise, and the 2007 Cooperative Mechanism under Article 43 with its Aids to Navigation Fund that does not amount to a toll. State its limits for Hormuz: the core issue there is Iran's security, not navigational safety. 4. **Body — India's options —** Suggest route diversification alongside supplier diversification, larger strategic reserves, naval escort under Operation Sankalp, diplomacy with Iran and Oman, and support for a user-state cooperative mechanism for Hormuz, while holding to freedom of navigation under UNCLOS as a consistent principle. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that a rules-based order at sea survives only when littoral and user states both gain from it, and that India, as a major user and a party to UNCLOS, has an interest in building such bargains rather than paying tolls.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Both Hormuz and the Red Sea are disrupted and refiners warn of a shortfall next month. What are your first three decisions?** ***Approach:*** First, I would get a cargo-by-cargo picture from public sector refiners of what is at sea, what is contracted and by which route, so that the gap is measured and not guessed. Second, I would prepare a drawdown plan for the strategic reserves, prioritising refineries that supply fuel for transport, farms and power, while announcing it clearly to prevent panic buying. Third, I would work with the Ministry of External Affairs on shipments from suppliers whose routes remain open, and with the Directorate General of Shipping on insurance cover. Transparency about supply is itself a tool against hoarding. **Q2. As Director General of Shipping, Indian seafarers on foreign-flagged ships are asking whether they must sail into the Gulf. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** The safety of seafarers comes before the schedule of any cargo. I would issue an advisory identifying high-risk areas, require shipping companies and manning agents to inform crew of the risk and of their right to refuse to sail into a warlike area without penalty where contracts allow it, and ensure war-risk insurance and

compensation are in place. I would keep a round-the-clock helpline with the Navy and Indian missions in the region. Many Indian seafarers work on foreign ships, so coordination with flag states and employers is essential.

Q3. An interview board asks: if Iran offers safe passage to Indian tankers in exchange for a fee, should India pay?

Approach: Paying would get oil to Indian refineries in the short term, but it would accept that a right of passage under international law can be sold, which damages India's own position on freedom of navigation elsewhere, including in the South China Sea. It could also expose Indian companies to sanctions risk. A better path is to negotiate safe passage as part of wider diplomacy with Iran and Oman, and to support a cooperative fund for safety services on the Malacca model, where users contribute for services and not for permission. Principle and cargo need not be traded against each other if the arrangement is designed well.

4.2 Pakistan Strikes Kunar and Paktika, Ending Three Months of Relative Calm Along the Durand Line

THE NEWS Kabul, Islamabad and New Delhi. Pakistan carried out fresh strikes inside Afghanistan early on Monday, September 21, across the Durand Line — the 1893 boundary between British India and Afghanistan that Afghanistan has never formally accepted. The Economic Times says at least three people were killed and six injured, that the strikes in Kunar province were Pakistan's first known airstrikes inside Afghanistan since June 29, and that Pakistan claimed 28 militants were killed. The Indian Express, citing Reuters, reports that Pakistan's Information Ministry gave the toll of 28 militants while its military did not comment, that a Pakistani security official named the provinces of Paktika and Kunar, and that the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) confirmed three civilian deaths — a man, a woman and a girl. The Hindu, citing AFP from Patan in Afghanistan, reports Islamabad's claim that it targeted "terrorist hubs" in an "intelligence-driven ground operation", so the papers describe the Pakistani action differently: airstrikes in ET and IE, a ground operation in Pakistan's own statement as reported by The Hindu. The Taliban government rejected the claim, warned of an "appropriate response", and its Foreign Ministry summoned Pakistan's chargé d'affaires — the diplomat in charge of an embassy in the ambassador's absence — and lodged a protest. The ET adds that UNAMA had documented 28 civilians killed and 49 injured in Pakistani strikes in June, and 399 civilian casualties — 57 killed and 342 injured — from Pakistani cross-border strikes between April 1 and June 30. The IE says the conflict escalated in February and hundreds died in the first half of the year. On Saturday, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid told Al Arabiya English that Afghanistan would give a "crushing response", adding: "If Pakistan invokes Article 51 to violate the sanctity of Afghan territory, Afghanistan has the right to defend its country." In an ET op-ed, former Intelligence Bureau officer Avinash Mohananey notes that a fidayeen attack on the Kohat Police Lines on September 18 by Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan, a splinter of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), killed around 23 people including 16 policemen, and that mediation by Türkiye's intelligence chief and a Qatari security official, like China's effort at Urumqi in April, has not worked. The strikes came as the UN General Assembly meets this week. The syllabus link is GS2 on India and its neighbourhood.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Taliban return to power in Kabul in August 2021 → TTP attacks inside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rise and Islamabad accuses Kabul of harbouring them → conflict escalates from February 2026, with UNAMA recording 399 civilian casualties from Pakistani strikes between April and June → a TTP splinter kills around 23 at Kohat on September 18 → Pakistan strikes Kunar and Paktika on September 21 and the Taliban threaten a response, citing Article 51

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Durand Line is a colonial boundary that Kabul has never accepted —** The line was drawn in 1893 under an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary of British India, and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan, and runs for about 2,600 km. It divides Pashtun tribes on both sides, which is why successive Afghan governments, including the Taliban, have refused to treat it as an international border. Pakistan regards it as settled, inherited from British India in 1947. The dispute over its status sits under every present quarrel about fencing, refugees and cross-border

	militancy. 2. **Article 51 is claimed by both sides, and the non-state actor question is unsettled —** Article 51 of the UN Charter preserves the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs, until the Security Council has taken the necessary measures, and requires such measures to be reported to the Council at once. Its classic reading applies to attacks by states. Some states argue that it also permits force against non-state groups on another state's territory when that state is "unwilling or unable" to stop them; many others reject this. Pakistan's justification for strikes on TTP targets and the Taliban's counter-claim both rest on this contested reading. 3. **The TTP is distinct from the Afghan Taliban but tied to it —** The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan was formed in 2007 as an umbrella of Pakistani militant groups fighting the Pakistani state, mainly in the former tribal areas now merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It shares ideology and old networks with the Afghan Taliban, which is why Pakistan expected a friendly government in Kabul after 2021 to restrain it. The reverse happened: the TTP gained space, and the Taliban deny that militancy in Pakistan is anything but Pakistan's internal problem. 4. **India's stake in Afghanistan is built on development, not military presence —** India built the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul, the Afghan–India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam) in Herat and the Zaranj–Delaram road linking Afghanistan to Iran, and has used Iran's Chabahar port to send wheat and aid. India objects to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor because it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India regards as its own territory under Pakistan's illegal occupation. UNAMA was created by the UN Security Council in 2002 and reports on civilian casualties and human rights.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **India and its neighbourhood is a standing Mains theme —** The GS2 syllabus lists "India and its neighbourhood — relations" and "bilateral, regional and global groupings affecting India's interests". UPSC has asked about India's interests in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover and about terrorism emanating from the region. A Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict tests a candidate's ability to see India's interests in a quarrel in which India is not a party. 2. **Prelims favours places and boundaries —** Named lines — Durand Line, McMahon Line, Radcliffe Line — and the provinces or countries they separate are regular Prelims material. Kunar and Paktika border Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Wakhan corridor links Afghanistan to China; such map facts are asked more than personalities. 3. **International law of force is increasingly relevant —** Questions on the UN Charter's prohibition of force under Article 2(4) and the self-defence exception in Article 51 have become more relevant with several conflicts running at once. The present case gives a clean example of both sides citing the same Article.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Durand Line was demarcated in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan under an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. • Article 51 of the UN Charter recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. • Article 2(4) of the UN Charter requires members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. • The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established by the UN Security Council in 2002. • The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed in 2007 as an umbrella of

	militant groups opposed to the Pakistani state. ● India opposes the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor because it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, territory India claims as its own. ● The Salma Dam in Herat province, built with Indian assistance, is officially named the Afghan–India Friendship Dam.
ANALYSIS	1. **Pakistan is fighting the monster it helped raise, and neither side can win it with airstrikes —** For two decades Pakistan's security establishment treated a Taliban government in Kabul as "strategic depth" against India. The present conflict is the failure of that bet: a friendly Kabul has not restrained the TTP, and the Taliban refuse to treat the Durand Line as a border they must police. Airstrikes can punish, but they cannot compel a government that gains legitimacy at home by defying Islamabad. The Kohat attack, a day after which the TTP killed six soldiers, suggests that strikes are not reducing the violence they are meant to deter. 2. **The dispute over facts is itself a dispute over law —** Pakistan speaks of 28 militants killed and a "ground operation" against "terrorist hubs"; the Taliban and UNAMA speak of three civilians, including a girl. These are not only rival numbers: under international humanitarian law, the legitimacy of force depends on distinction between fighters and civilians, and under Article 51 on the existence of an armed attack to which it responds. UNAMA's independent count of 399 civilian casualties between April and June is therefore the most important figure in the story, because it is the only one not produced by a party to the conflict. 3. **For India, Pakistan's western distraction is not a gain to be celebrated —** It is tempting to read a two-front problem for Pakistan as relief for India. Mohananey's own account cuts the other way: an army outsourcing security to "lashkars" of former Afghan soldiers and losing control of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan makes the region less predictable, not more. Instability produces armed men, refugees and arms markets that do not respect borders, and a weakened Pakistani state may seek external adventures to rally domestic support. India's interest lies in a stable Afghanistan that does not host groups hostile to India, which requires engaging Kabul without appearing to take sides in its quarrel with Islamabad. 4. **Other mediators are failing, which opens diplomatic room, not military room —** The ET op-ed notes that China's mediation at Urumqi in April and Türkiye and Qatar's efforts have not produced results, and that China's plan to extend CPEC to Kabul remains a pipe dream. China's frustration matters to India because it limits Beijing's ability to build an economic bloc across India's north-west. India has consistent development credentials in Afghanistan — the Parliament building, Salma Dam, Chabahar-linked aid — and can deepen humanitarian and trade engagement. The counter-view is that engagement with the Taliban lends them legitimacy while they restrict women's education; India has to balance principle with presence. 5. **The timing is aimed at New York —** The strikes came as the UN General Assembly meets, and the ET says the issue may figure there. Both sides are pitching their case to an international audience: Pakistan as a victim of terrorism exercising self-defence, Afghanistan as a sovereign state under attack. India, which has long argued at the UN that states must not harbour terrorists, will find its own language being used by Pakistan. The Indian position is best served by insisting on a single standard: no territory to be used for terrorism, and no cross-border force in violation of the Charter.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Taliban's return to power in Kabul was expected to secure Pakistan's western frontier; instead it has become its most active front." Analyse the causes of the Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict and its implications for India's security and regional interests. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the development: Pakistan's strikes on Kunar and Paktika on September 21, the first known since June 29, with rival claims of 28 militants and three civilians, and the Taliban's threat of a response citing Article 51. 2. **Body — causes —** Explain the unrecognised Durand Line, the TTP's use of the border belt, Pakistan's failed strategic-depth policy, the escalation since February 2026, and the Kohat attack of September 18. Use UNAMA's figure of 399 civilian casualties between April 1 and June 30 to show the scale. 3. **Body — legal dimension —** Discuss Article 2(4) and Article 51 of the UN Charter and the contested "unwilling or unable" doctrine against non-state actors, noting that both sides claim self-defence. 4. **Body — implications for India —** Cover the risk of instability spilling over, the failure of Chinese mediation and CPEC extension, India's development partnership and Chabahar access, and the need for a single standard on terrorism and sovereignty at the UN. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India gains most from a stable Afghanistan that denies space to anti-India groups, and should engage Kabul pragmatically while keeping out of the Pakistan–Afghanistan quarrel.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are a Joint Secretary handling Afghanistan in the Ministry of External Affairs. The Taliban request urgent Indian humanitarian help for people displaced by the strikes. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** Humanitarian help should be given on need, not on politics, and India has a record of sending wheat and medicines to Afghans. I would route aid through UN agencies or trusted channels already used, so that it reaches civilians and does not appear to be support for either side in a military conflict. I would coordinate with the Ministry of Home Affairs and security agencies on logistics and with Indian missions in the region. A clear public statement would describe the aid as humanitarian, which protects India's neutrality. **Q2. As an Indian diplomat at the UN General Assembly, Pakistan cites Article 51 to justify strikes on terrorists in Afghanistan, using arguments India itself has made about cross-border terrorism. How would you frame India's position?** ***Approach:*** I would stress that India's position has always been that no state should allow its territory to be used for terrorism, and that this applies to every state, including Pakistan. At the same time, I would say that the protection of civilians is non-negotiable and that independent verification, such as by UNAMA, should guide judgments. India need not endorse either side; it can support the principle of accountability for terrorism and restraint in the use of force together. Consistency is what gives India's own counter-terrorism case its credibility. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India recognise the Taliban government?** ***Approach:*** Recognition is a political act that signals acceptance of a government's legitimacy, and the Taliban's restrictions on women's education and the question of inclusive government remain serious concerns. At the same time, India has real interests in Afghanistan — security, connectivity through Chabahar, and the goodwill of the Afghan people built through development projects. A sensible course is functional engagement on trade, aid and security without formal recognition until the Taliban meet widely shared benchmarks, in step with other major states. Engagement and recognition are not the same, and India can do the first without the second.

4.3 India Joins EU–Brazil–Kenya–Canada 'Partners for Multilateralism' Meeting as Jaishankar Arrives for UNGA

THE NEWS New Delhi and New York. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar landed in New York on Monday, September 21, at the start of the UN General Assembly's high-level debate, and was set to attend a meeting of the "Partners for Multilateralism" (P4M), The Hindu's Suhasini Haidar reports. Multilateralism means countries working together through shared rules and institutions such as the UN, rather than through power or one-to-one bargains. The P4M was founded by the European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada, and its leaders — European Council President António Costa, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Kenyan President William Ruto and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney — set out its purpose in a joint editorial in the Financial Times. They wrote that the grouping will support the UN but push for it to be more representative and better prepared for challenges including artificial intelligence, climate change, health security and digital transformation: "P4M will support the reform of the UN and other multilateral institutions, to make them more representative, legitimate, effective and trusted." The P4M, they said, will not create another exclusive bloc or international bureaucracy, but "a flexible, open framework for countries from different regions and political traditions that are willing to work across divides". The co-authors noted that 2025 saw the highest recorded number of state-based armed conflicts since 1946, in 35 countries, and the highest recorded military spending, of nearly $3 trillion. The editorial cited UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who has said "superpowers are discovering their limits"; speaking to The Hindu in New Delhi during the 18th BRICS Summit, Mr. Guterres said "it's time for superpowers to understand the limits of their power", pointing to Russia's war in Ukraine and the U.S. facing "difficulties" in its war in Iran. Mr. Guterres demits office later this year. The Hindu recalls that Mr. Carney spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January of "middle powers" coming together, a speech that signalled dissatisfaction with Russia and China and with the U.S. over tariffs, expansionism and the Iran conflict. It is unclear whether India was asked to join the joint message, and India is already part of groups with similar aims — the Non-Aligned Movement, BRICS, the G20 and the G-4. Mr. Jaishankar will hold bilateral and multilateral meetings and address the UNGA on September 26. The syllabus link is GS2 on important international institutions, their structure and mandate.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

UN Security Council structure frozen since the 1965 expansion → great-power vetoes and unilateral wars in Ukraine and Iran paralyse collective action → 2025 records the most state-based armed conflicts since 1946 and nearly $3 trillion in military spending → Carney's Davos "middle powers" speech in January → EU, Brazil, Kenya and Canada launch P4M and India attends its meeting at the UNGA

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Changing the Security Council needs the consent of those who hold the veto —** Article 108 of the UN Charter says an amendment comes into force only when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of member states, including all five permanent members. The only enlargement so far, in force from 1965, raised the Council from 11 to 15 members by adding non-permanent seats. Article 23 fixes the five permanent members — China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S. — and Article 27(3) gives each a veto over substantive decisions. This is why reform groupings can build pressure but cannot change the Council without the P5. 2. **Reform camps are divided on the permanent seats, not on the need for reform —** The G-4 — India, Brazil, Germany and Japan — support one another's bids for permanent seats. The Uniting for Consensus group, which includes Italy and Pakistan, opposes new permanent members and favours longer-term non-permanent seats. The African Union's common position, the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, demands two permanent seats with veto and additional non-permanent seats for Africa. Intergovernmental negotiations on Council reform have run in the General Assembly since 2009 without a text-based outcome. 3. **India's multi-alignment is a design, not a contradiction —** India was a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement at Belgrade in 1961 and is a member of BRICS, the G20, the Quad and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The logic is to join issue-based coalitions without binding alliances, preserving what India calls strategic autonomy. India has used the phrase "reformed multilateralism" to argue that institutions built in 1945 must reflect today's distribution of power and population. At the UN Summit of

	the Future in 2024, member states adopted the Pact for the Future, which included commitments on Security Council reform. 4. **The Secretary-General is chosen by the Assembly on the Council's recommendation —** Under Article 97 of the Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council, which means the P5 can each block a candidate. By convention the post has a five-year term and rotates informally among regions. Mr. Guterres, who took office in January 2017, completes his second term this year, so the choice of his successor is part of the same debate about how representative the UN is.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **UN reform is among the most predictable Mains themes —** The GS2 syllabus lists "important international institutions, agencies and fora — their structure, mandate". UPSC has asked about India's case for a permanent seat and about the relevance of the UN in a multipolar world. P4M gives a new example of middle powers building reform coalitions outside the Security Council. 2. **Groupings and their members are staple Prelims fare —** The examiner frequently asks which countries belong to which grouping — G-4, BRICS, IBSA, Quad. A new grouping with four founders drawn from three continents is exactly the kind of fact that is tested, along with the Charter articles on amendment and the veto. 3. **Useful for PSIR and the essay —** The idea of middle powers and the limits of great-power hegemony feeds into PSIR Paper 2 and into essay topics on multilateralism and global governance. Guterres' phrase that superpowers are discovering their limits is a quotable opening.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, amendments come into force when adopted by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of UN members including all permanent members of the Security Council. • The UN Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965; the number of permanent members remained five. • Article 27(3) of the UN Charter requires the concurring votes of the permanent members for Security Council decisions on non-procedural matters, which is the basis of the veto. • The G-4 comprises India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, which support each other's bids for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. • The Ezulwini Consensus is the African Union's common position on UN reform, seeking two permanent and additional non-permanent Security Council seats for Africa. • Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. • The founders of the Partners for Multilateralism (P4M) initiative are the European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada.
ANALYSIS	1. **P4M is a coalition of the frustrated, and its weakness is that it has no veto —** The four founders share a complaint, not a programme: each has been hurt by unilateral action from one or more great powers, whether on trade, security or climate. Their answer is to strengthen the UN, but the UN's central organ can be changed only with the consent of the five powers whose behaviour prompted the complaint. A flexible, open framework can shape debates on AI, health and climate, where rules are still being written. On Security Council reform, it can add voices but not votes, and the P5 have ignored far larger coalitions before.

	2. **Attending costs India little; signing up to its reform script could cost more —** India's decision to attend rather than co-found is sensible. The founders include Brazil, a G-4 partner, and Kenya, whose continent insists on the Ezulwini Consensus, including permanent seats with veto for Africa. A reform formula that satisfied the EU might favour stronger General Assembly powers over new permanent seats, which is not India's priority. By attending, India can shape the P4M's agenda towards representation in the Council, without committing to positions that could be used against its own claim. 3. **The most striking fact is that it is unclear whether India was even asked —** The Hindu notes it is unclear whether India was asked to join the joint editorial. For a country that calls itself the voice of the Global South and hosted the 18th BRICS Summit, being outside the founding message of a reform coalition is a signal worth reading. It may reflect India's careful neutrality on the Iran war and the Ukraine war, which middle powers such as Canada and the EU have criticised more openly. Multi-alignment brings access to every room, but sometimes at the cost of leadership in any one of them. 4. **Crowded forums dilute the case for any single one —** India is already in NAM, BRICS, the G20 and the G-4, and each claims to reform global governance. Adding a fifth forum risks spreading diplomatic effort thin and giving great powers the excuse that the reformers cannot agree among themselves. The counter-view is that overlapping coalitions are how middle powers exert influence in a multipolar world: each forum captures a different set of partners, and P4M links Europe and Canada with the Global South in a way BRICS does not. The test will be whether P4M produces concrete proposals, as its founders promise, or only statements. 5. **The succession of the Secretary-General is the first real test —** Guterres leaves office this year, and the choice of his successor is made by the General Assembly only on the Security Council's recommendation. If P4M and like-minded groupings can push for a more open and transparent selection, they would show that reform is possible within the Charter as it stands. That would be a modest but visible gain, and a more realistic target than the permanent seats that have been deadlocked for decades.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Middle powers cannot rewrite the UN Charter, but they can decide whether it is used." In the context of the new 'Partners for Multilateralism' initiative, discuss the prospects of UN reform and evaluate India's approach of multi-alignment in reforming global governance. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Introduce the P4M, founded by the EU, Brazil, Kenya and Canada, and India's attendance at its meeting during the UNGA, with the founders' stated aim of making the UN more representative, legitimate, effective and trusted. 2. **Body — why reform is needed and why it stalls —** Cite the 2025 record of state-based conflicts and military spending, and Guterres' remark on the limits of superpowers. Explain Article 108, the veto under Article 27(3), and the split between the G-4, Uniting for Consensus and the Ezulwini Consensus. 3. **Body — India's multi-alignment —** Discuss India's membership in NAM, BRICS, the G20 and the G-4, the idea of reformed multilateralism, and the benefits and risks of attending P4M without co-founding it. 4. **Body — realistic gains —** Suggest achievable steps: reform of Secretary-General selection, working methods of the Council, new rules for AI, health and climate, and stronger General Assembly initiatives, while continuing the push for permanent seats. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India's interest lies in coalitions that raise the cost of great-power unilateralism, and that its credibility depends on consistent positions

	across wars and forums.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are India's Permanent Representative to the UN. P4M's founders invite India to co-sign a reform statement that proposes more non-permanent seats but says nothing about new permanent members. What do you advise New Delhi?** ***Approach:*** I would advise engaging with the text rather than refusing outright, since India shares the goals of representation and effectiveness. I would propose language that keeps both categories of membership open, which is the G-4 position, and consult Brazil, a G-4 partner, and African members. If the statement cannot be amended, India can associate with its broad aims in a separate national statement without signing. The priority is to avoid a text that could later be cited against India's claim. **Q2. An interview board asks: if India is already in BRICS, G20 and G-4, why join yet another grouping?** ***Approach:*** Each grouping brings a different set of partners and a different agenda. BRICS links India with Russia and China, the G20 with the major economies, and the G-4 with other seat aspirants, while P4M links the EU and Canada with countries of the Global South. Being present lets India shape agendas and gather support for its own priorities. The cost is diplomatic bandwidth, so India should participate where it can influence outcomes and not simply collect memberships. **Q3. As a Joint Secretary in the UN division of the Ministry of External Affairs, how would you prepare the Minister for a meeting of a new grouping whose founders have openly criticised the United States?** ***Approach:*** I would brief the Minister on each founder's position on the issues likely to arise — the Iran war, Ukraine, trade and tariffs — and on where India's position differs. I would suggest that India speak about principles such as reform, representation and the Charter, rather than join criticism of any particular country. I would prepare short interventions on areas where India has credibility, such as digital public infrastructure and climate finance. The aim is to contribute substance while protecting India's relations with all major powers.

4.4 Houthi Advance Exposes the Unratified Mecca Defence Pact as Pakistan and Türkiye Decline to Fight

THE NEWS Dubai and New Delhi. The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA) between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, signed on August 7, set up a framework for collective deterrence and said an armed attack on any of the three would be an attack on all, writes Sabine Ameer, a contributing researcher with the Observer Research Foundation, in The Indian Express. This is collective self-defence — states agreeing in advance to defend one another — which the pact grounds in Article 51 of the UN Charter. Within hours of signing, it was labelled an "Islamic NATO", but she argues it lacks NATO's institutional structure, command arrangements and bureaucracy, which is why it has failed to shield Saudi Arabia from the ongoing Houthi attacks. She gives three reasons: the agreement lacks official ratification — formal approval by each state's own constitutional process; its mutual defence terms are not yet legally binding; and Türkiye and Pakistan must clear it through their parliaments while Saudi Arabia must approve it by royal decree. Riyadh, she writes, has turned to Europe after a cold response from the U.S., but the EU keeps an internal restriction on military assistance to Saudi Arabia because of alleged violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia intervened in March 2015 to back the internationally recognised government. The International Organisation for Migration counts over 104,796 people displaced in Yemen. In the Economic Times, former Intelligence Bureau officer Avinash Mohananey says the pact was renamed the Mecca Defence Alliance on August 31, that Pakistan and Türkiye are refusing to become combatants in the Saudi war against the Houthis, and that Türkiye has agreed only to "technical support". The Houthis have warned: "if Türkiye and Pakistan become involved, we will strike them with an iron fist." Mohananey expects the alliance to meet the fate of the Board of Peace and the Abraham Accords. The Indian Express, citing Reuters and The New York Times, reports that President Donald Trump called off planned U.S. airstrikes on the Houthis at the last minute on Sunday despite pleas from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and that Houthi fighters are pushing to seize the Kahboub mountains in Taiz and

Lahij provinces to cut off the Red Sea coast from government-held areas. The syllabus link is GS2 on India's interests in the Gulf, home to a large Indian diaspora, and on regional security arrangements.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Saudi-led coalition intervenes in Yemen in March 2015 → the Houthis survive and, backed by Iran, expand during the 2026 West Asia war → Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye sign the Mecca pact on August 7 and rename it on August 31 → a Houthi lightning advance takes Bab el-Mandeb and strikes Saudi oil infrastructure → Pakistan and Türkiye decline to fight, the U.S. calls off strikes, and the unratified pact is exposed

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Collective self-defence is lawful, but a treaty is not an army** — Article 51 of the UN Charter recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs, until the Security Council acts. Article 52 permits regional arrangements for maintaining peace, provided they are consistent with the Charter's purposes. NATO, created by the Washington Treaty of 1949, is the model: Article 5 says an armed attack on one member in Europe or North America is an attack on all, but each member responds with "such action as it deems necessary". NATO's strength lies less in Article 5 than in its integrated command, common planning and permanent bureaucracy, which the Mecca pact lacks. 2. **Ratification is what turns a signature into a binding obligation** — Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, a state may express consent to be bound by signature, ratification, acceptance or accession, depending on what the treaty says. When a treaty requires ratification, signature alone creates only an obligation not to defeat its object and purpose, not the full obligations. In India, the power to make and ratify treaties rests with the Union executive, and Parliament legislates to implement them under Article 253 of the Constitution. The Mecca pact's need for parliamentary and royal approval means its promises are not yet legally enforceable. 3. **Yemen's war is a civil war with regional sponsors** — The Houthis, formally Ansar Allah, are a Zaidi Shia movement from northern Yemen that took Sanaa in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led intervention of March 2015. UN Security Council Resolution 2216 of 2015 imposed an arms embargo on Houthi leaders and demanded their withdrawal from seized areas. The Houthis are backed by Iran and form part of what Tehran calls the "axis of resistance" along with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The internationally recognised government is based in Aden, with a Presidential Leadership Council headed by Rashad al-Alimi. 4. **India's stake in the Gulf is people, energy and remittances** — The Gulf Cooperation Council countries host the largest concentration of the Indian diaspora, and remittances from the region are a major share of India's inward remittances, which make India the world's largest recipient. Saudi Arabia is among India's top suppliers of crude oil and LPG, and India and Saudi Arabia set up a Strategic Partnership Council in 2019. India evacuated its citizens from Yemen in 2015 under Operation Raahat, a model for crisis response in the region.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **West Asia and the diaspora are a steady GS2 theme** — The syllabus lists the "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests" and the "Indian diaspora". UPSC has asked about India's relations with the Gulf, the Abraham Accords and India's balancing between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel. A Saudi–Pakistan–Türkiye security pact is a new variable in that balancing. 2. **Treaty law and collective security feed Prelims** — Questions on the difference between signature and ratification, the Vienna Convention, and NATO's Article 5 are standard. The question whether a pact is legally binding is exactly the kind of conceptual trap the examiner sets. 3. **Pakistan's alliances are always an Indian security question** — Any defence pact

	involving Pakistan draws attention to whether it could be invoked against India. The present Houthi test shows the limits of such pacts in practice, which is useful for a balanced Mains answer.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty, 1949) provides that an armed attack against one or more members shall be considered an attack against them all. ● Article 52 of the UN Charter permits regional arrangements or agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security consistent with the purposes of the UN. ● Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, where a treaty requires ratification, a state that has only signed it is obliged to refrain from acts that would defeat its object and purpose. ● UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) imposed an arms embargo on Houthi leaders and forces in Yemen. ● Under Article 253 of the Constitution, Parliament may make laws for the whole or any part of India to implement any treaty, agreement or convention with other countries. ● Operation Raahat (2015) was India's evacuation of its nationals and foreign citizens from war-hit Yemen. ● The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement, signed on August 7, 2026, is between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan.
ANALYSIS	1. **The pact failed its first test because each member signed for a different enemy —** Ameer's observation that Islamabad's main security concern is India, while Ankara's spans Syria, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus, explains the failure better than the missing ratification. Saudi Arabia wanted help against Iran and its proxies; Pakistan wanted Saudi money and prestige; Türkiye wanted a larger role in the Islamic world. When the first attack came from the Houthis, only Riyadh was threatened. An alliance whose members face different enemies works only when the enemy is common, and here it was not. 2. **Pakistan's refusal is driven by its own society, not only by its army —** Mohananey argues that support for Iran and its proxies in Pakistan cuts across the Shia–Sunni divide, so sending troops to fight the Houthis would be domestically dangerous. Pakistan has a large Shia minority and a long border with Iran, and it is already fighting the TTP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and separatists in Balochistan. It is no surprise that it offers statements in support of Saudi security but not boots on the ground. The counter-view is that Pakistan's dependence on Saudi finance may eventually force its hand, which Mohananey also flags. 3. **An "Islamic NATO" would have been a concern for India; a paper alliance is not —** Indian analysts worried that a Saudi–Pakistan–Türkiye pact could bring Saudi money and Turkish technology into Pakistan's rivalry with India. Mohananey argues those fears were exaggerated, and the pact's behaviour so far supports him. But the bigger risk for India is not the alliance but the war it failed to prevent: attacks on Saudi refineries, the loss of Bab el-Mandeb, and instability in a region where millions of Indians work. India's interest is Gulf stability, which a failed alliance does not deliver. 4. **Saudi Arabia's turn to Europe shows the limits of the U.S. security umbrella —** Trump calling off strikes at the last minute, after troops were loading bombs, tells Gulf states that U.S. protection is no longer automatic. Riyadh's turn to Europe is limited by the EU's own restriction on military assistance tied to Yemen's humanitarian record. The Gulf is thus entering a period in which regional states must hedge between patrons.

	This is the same multipolar drift India has long predicted, and it gives India room to deepen its own security ties in the Gulf, in maritime security and training, without taking sides in the Saudi–Houthi war.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Collective defence is easier to sign than to fight for.” Examine the limits of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye in the light of the Houthi offensive, and assess its implications for India’s interests in the Gulf. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the pact’s basics: signed on August 7, renamed the Mecca Defence Alliance on August 31, grounded in Article 51, with an attack on one treated as an attack on all. 2. **Body — why it has failed so far —** Give the three legal reasons from the IE op-ed — no ratification, non-binding terms, pending parliamentary and royal approval — and the political reasons: divergent threat perceptions, Pakistani domestic opinion, Türkiye’s limited “technical support”, and the lack of a NATO-like structure. 3. **Body — the regional context —** Explain the Yemen war since 2015, the Houthi advance and loss of Bab el-Mandeb, the U.S. calling off strikes, and the EU’s restriction on military help. 4. **Body — implications for India —** Cover energy supplies, the diaspora and remittances, the security implications of any Pakistan-linked pact, and India’s scope for maritime and evacuation preparedness, with Operation Raahat as precedent. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India should strengthen its bilateral ties with Gulf states and its maritime capacity rather than react to alliances that exist mostly on paper.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are India’s Ambassador in Riyadh. Houthi missiles hit oil facilities near areas where Indian workers live. What do you do in the first 48 hours?** ***Approach:*** I would activate the mission’s emergency cell and helpline, and use community associations and employers to account for Indian workers in the affected areas. I would coordinate with Saudi authorities on safe zones and medical care, and prepare contingency plans for evacuation with the Navy and Air India, drawing on Operation Raahat. Regular public advisories would keep families in India informed and prevent rumours. The first duty of a mission in a crisis is the safety of its citizens. **Q2. As a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, you are asked whether India should express concern about the Mecca pact. What is your advice?** ***Approach:*** I would advise against a public statement, since the pact is unratified, has not been invoked against India, and is visibly struggling with its first test. A statement would give it more importance than it has and could irritate Saudi Arabia, a key energy and diaspora partner. Instead, India should track its evolution closely and raise any concerns privately in its strategic dialogues with Riyadh and Ankara. Quiet diplomacy suits a threat that is still hypothetical. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India join or form military alliances to secure its interests in the Gulf?** ***Approach:*** India’s tradition of strategic autonomy argues against binding military alliances, which could draw it into wars not of its choosing, especially in a region with rival Iranian, Saudi and Israeli interests. What India needs is capability and partnerships: naval presence to protect shipping, defence cooperation and training with Gulf states, and evacuation readiness. The fate of the Mecca pact shows that alliances without shared interests do not deliver security. Flexible partnerships serve India better than formal alliances.

5. Environment & Ecology

Each of today's environment stories is about who pays when a law or a label no longer matches reality. Nepal wants the cost of Himalayan floods treated as a debt, not a favour. Shimla finds that taking a monkey off a legal schedule did not take it off the roof. Delhi is paying households twice over to do what free electricity discouraged them from doing. And the car market's celebrated "fuel crossover" turns out, on inspection, to run mostly on another fossil fuel. In every case the label is easy to change; the money, the institutions and the behaviour are what decide the outcome.

5.1 Nepal Recasts Flood Losses as a Climate-Justice Claim, Testing India's Stand on Loss and Damage

THE NEWS Kathmandu and New Delhi. An opinion article in The Indian Express on September 22, written by a professor at the School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi, argues that Nepal has changed the terms on which it deals with disasters, and that India must respond. For decades, the writer notes, India acted as a friendly "first responder" whenever cloudbursts, landslides or flash floods struck Nepal. After the recent catastrophic flash floods, however, Nepal's leadership has moved "from a paradigm of ad-hoc relief to a framework of climate justice and financial liability". Kathmandu has appealed to the UN-backed Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage — "loss and damage" means the harm from climate change that can no longer be avoided by cutting emissions or adapting, such as destroyed homes and lost lives — while calling on developed countries to deliver compensation and concessional climate finance, meaning loans cheaper than market rates. It is also pressing its neighbours, including China and India, for cooperation on preparedness, data sharing and resilience. Nepal has clarified that it is not seeking damages from any single country, but, the writer says, the expectation placed on its neighbours is unmistakable. Prime Minister Balendra Shah will take the case to the UN General Assembly on September 24. The article cites a $49.9 million Green Climate Fund project to protect Nepalese communities from glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs — sudden floods when a lake dammed by ice or loose glacial debris bursts) that sat in the Fund's pipeline for over seven years, and says Nepal faces a reconstruction bill of nearly 10 per cent of its GDP. Mountain and downstream nations, it argues, are applying the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities locally, pointing to high-emitting neighbours. The writer's prescription is that India avoid both legal liability and passive aid, and instead champion a South Asian Resilience and Insurance Facility through the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BIMSTEC or a "Third Pole Compact" — the Third Pole being the Himalaya–Tibet ice mass — paying out automatically when satellites detect pre-set climate triggers, alongside shared GLOF monitoring data and an open Himalayan early-warning system. The Hindu and The Economic Times carry no report on Nepal's appeal today, so this account rests on the Express article. The syllabus link is climate finance, the UNFCCC and India's neighbourhood policy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Himalayan warming swells glacial lakes and intensifies cloudbursts → catastrophic flash floods in Nepal with a reconstruction bill near 10% of GDP → global funds such as the GCF prove slow, keeping a GLOF project in the pipeline for seven years → Nepal appeals to the Loss and Damage Fund and presses neighbours, invoking CBDR regionally → India must choose between liability, aid, or a regional insurance architecture

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Loss and damage is the third pillar of climate action, after mitigation and adaptation** — The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage was set up at COP19 in 2013. Article 8 of the Paris Agreement recognises the importance of averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage, but Decision 1/CP.21 that adopted the Agreement states that Article 8 does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation. COP27 at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022 decided to establish new funding arrangements, including a dedicated fund, and COP28 at Dubai in 2023 operationalised the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage, with the World Bank as its interim trustee. The Santiago Network provides technical assistance to vulnerable countries. 2. **Common but differentiated responsibilities is written into the 1992 Convention itself** — Article 3.1 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change asks parties to protect the climate system on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). The Convention divided countries into Annex I (industrialised) and non-Annex I parties; India and Nepal are both non-Annex I. The Paris Agreement kept the principle but

added the phrase "in the light of different national circumstances", which softened the old binary. India has consistently used CBDR to argue that historical emitters must lead on finance.

3. **The Green Climate Fund is the main multilateral channel, and it works through accredited entities —** The Green Climate Fund was established at COP16 in Cancun in 2010 and is headquartered in Songdo, South Korea. It is an operating entity of the Convention's financial mechanism and funds both mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries. Money flows through accredited entities — national or international bodies that pass the Fund's fiduciary standards — which is one reason project cycles are long. The Adaptation Fund, set up under the Kyoto Protocol, is a separate and smaller channel.

4. **The Hindu Kush Himalaya is the Third Pole, and GLOFs are its signature hazard —** The Hindu Kush Himalaya holds the largest store of ice outside the polar regions and feeds rivers such as the Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an intergovernmental body headquartered in Kathmandu, has eight regional member countries including India, Nepal and China. India's National Disaster Management Authority issued guidelines on managing glacial lake outburst floods in 2020. The October 2023 outburst of South Lhonak lake in Sikkim, which breached the Teesta III dam, showed that the hazard is Indian as well as Nepalese.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **The syllabus joins environment, disaster management and the neighbourhood —** GS3 lists conservation, environmental degradation and disaster management; GS2 lists India and its neighbourhood. A question that asks how India should respond to a neighbour's climate claim sits across both papers, and examiners reward answers that hold the diplomatic and the environmental argument together rather than treating them in separate paragraphs.

2. **Prelims tests the architecture of climate finance —** The Commission has asked directly about the Green Climate Fund, and COP outcomes regularly appear as statement-based questions. The likely targets are which COP created which fund, who hosts or trustees it, whether Article 8 creates liability, and what CBDR-RC stands for. Names of current funding pledges are transient; the institutional facts are not.

3. **Mains has moved from 'what was agreed' to 'what should India do' —** Recent Mains questions on climate conferences have asked candidates to evaluate outcomes and India's position rather than list them. The Nepal case supplies a concrete test of India's dual identity — a climate victim and developing country in Bonn, but a larger and wealthier emitter in Kathmandu's eyes.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage was agreed at COP27 at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022 and operationalised at COP28 in Dubai in 2023, with the World Bank as interim trustee.
- Article 8 of the Paris Agreement deals with loss and damage, and Decision 1/CP.21 records that it does not provide a basis for liability or compensation.
- The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage was established at COP19 in 2013.
- The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities appears in Article 3.1 of the UNFCCC, 1992.
- The Green Climate Fund was established at COP16 in Cancun in 2010 and is headquartered in Songdo, South Korea.
- ICIMOD, an intergovernmental knowledge centre on the Hindu Kush Himalaya, is

	headquartered in Kathmandu. ● A glacial lake outburst flood is a sudden release of water from a lake dammed by glacier ice or a moraine.
ANALYSIS	1. **Nepal has borrowed India's own argument and pointed it at India —** India has spent three decades telling the rich world that those who emitted more must pay more. Nepal's appeal applies the same logic one step down the ladder: to a mountain country of Nepal's size, India and China are the large emitters next door. The careful clause that Nepal seeks damages from no single country is what makes the argument hard to reject, because it turns a legal claim into a request for cooperation. India cannot dismiss the reasoning without weakening the case it makes at every COP. 2. **The fear of a liability precedent is real but already answered in treaty text —** The writer is right that paying explicit "climate damages" could expose India to similar claims elsewhere. But the Paris decision already states that Article 8 creates no basis for liability or compensation, and the Loss and Damage Fund was designed on that footing. India can therefore contribute to regional resilience without conceding fault, just as developed countries contribute to the Fund without admitting legal liability. The real danger lies in vocabulary, not in money, which is why the proposal to avoid fault-based terminology is sound. 3. **Speed, not size, is the failure of global climate finance —** A $49.9 million GLOF project that waited seven years is a sharper indictment than any figure on total pledges. Parametric insurance — which pays out when a measured trigger such as rainfall or lake volume crosses a threshold, not after a loss assessment — is built for exactly this problem, and regional pools such as the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility have run on this model since 2007. The honest counter-view is basis risk: a trigger can fail to fire when a village is destroyed, or fire when damage is modest. A facility for South Asia would need careful trigger design and Indian satellite data to earn trust. 4. **Data sharing is the hardest ask, because rivers are treated as security —** India has historically treated hydrological data on shared rivers with caution, and China shares Brahmaputra flood-season data only under specific arrangements. Co-owning GLOF monitoring data with Nepal, as the writer suggests, would require India to see early warning as a public good rather than a strategic asset. That shift would also strengthen India's hand in asking China for upstream data, since it is difficult to demand from Beijing what one withholds from Kathmandu. 5. **A regional facility would insure India as much as Nepal —** The Sikkim outburst of 2023 and repeated Himalayan disasters in Uttarakhand and Himachal show that Indian States face the same hazards. A pool that pays quickly on satellite triggers would stabilise annual Indian disaster spending too, which the writer notes as a benefit. Framed this way, India would be not a donor under pressure but a member protecting itself, which is politically easier at home and more credible abroad. The geopolitical cost of an evasive reply is also real: the article notes that China is stepping up its climate outreach across the Himalayas.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Climate justice is no longer a demand made only of the Global North; it is increasingly being made of emerging economies by their smaller neighbours." In the light of Nepal's appeal for loss-and-damage support after recent floods, examine the dilemma this poses for India's climate diplomacy and suggest a regional architecture that reconciles India's negotiating position with its neighbourhood responsibilities. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Open with the shift: after recent flash floods Nepal has moved from seeking ad-hoc relief to invoking climate justice, appealing to the Loss and Damage Fund and pressing neighbours for cooperation, and its Prime Minister is taking the case to the UN General Assembly on September 24.

	2. Body — the dilemma — Explain India's position on CBDR-RC under Article 3.1 of the UNFCCC and its insistence that historical emitters pay; then show how Nepal applies the same principle regionally. Lay out the two risks: accepting liability sets a precedent, while refusing it costs goodwill and gives China room in the Himalaya. **3. Body — why global mechanisms fall short —** Use the seven-year GCF pipeline for a $49.9 million GLOF project and a reconstruction bill near 10% of Nepal's GDP to show that speed is the gap. Cite the Paris decision that Article 8 creates no liability, to show India can contribute without conceding fault. **4. Body — a regional architecture —** Propose a South Asian parametric insurance and resilience facility through BIMSTEC, the NDB or AIIB; shared GLOF monitoring and an open early-warning system using Indian satellites; resilience-first design of joint hydropower and road projects; and a role for ICIMOD. Mention basis risk and data sovereignty as design problems to be solved. **5. Conclusion —** Conclude that India can be a co-underwriter of regional resilience rather than either a defendant or a charity, and that doing so strengthens rather than weakens its hand in global negotiations.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Joint Secretary handling Nepal in the Ministry of External Affairs. Nepal's Prime Minister will raise loss and damage at the UN in two days. What do you recommend?** ***Approach:*** I would recommend a response that welcomes Nepal's focus on resilience and offers concrete cooperation, while keeping India's language consistent with its UNFCCC position that loss and damage support is not compensation for fault. The offer could include immediate reconstruction assistance, a proposal to share GLOF and flood-forecasting data, and an invitation to design a regional risk-pooling facility. I would coordinate the message with the Ministry of Environment so that nothing said in New York contradicts India's stand at the next COP. **Q2. As a District Magistrate in a Bihar district downstream of Nepal, how would you prepare for floods that originate across the border?** ***Approach:*** I would ensure that flood-forecasting information received through the Central Water Commission and existing India–Nepal arrangements reaches block and panchayat officials within hours, not days. I would map vulnerable embankments and villages, pre-position boats and relief material, and run evacuation drills before the monsoon peak. Good personal contact with district officials across the border, within the limits set by the government, often moves warnings faster than formal channels. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India pay for climate loss and damage in neighbouring countries?** ***Approach:*** India should not accept legal liability, both because its historical emissions are small and because the Paris framework itself rules out liability. But India should pay into resilience in its neighbourhood out of enlightened self-interest, since the Himalaya does not respect borders and India's own States face the same hazards. The distinction between compensation and cooperation is not a lawyer's trick; it determines whether India negotiates as a defendant or as a partner.

5.2 Shimla Macaque-Attack Death Exposes the Gap Left When the 2022 Amendment Delisted Rhesus Monkeys

THE NEWS Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. The Indian Express reports that a 63-year-old woman in Shimla was attacked by a pack of rhesus macaques on the roof of her house on August 30, suffered grievous injuries including spinal damage, and died on September 5. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 listed it as a protected species under Part I of Schedule II, but the

Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 removed it; a “schedule” is a list attached to the Act, and a species on it gets the Act’s protection and the forest department’s attention. Himachal’s Chief Wildlife Warden, Alok Prem Nagar, told the paper that State forest departments are “no more responsible” for the monkey menace and that a monkey “is now like a stray animal, which falls under the purview of civic bodies”. A senior Indian Forest Service officer said urban local bodies such as the Shimla Municipal Corporation are “not fully competent” for the job because of a lack of funds and of trained manpower to capture and sterilise monkeys, and that forest departments no longer receive the central funds they once did for monkey control. Municipal Commissioner Sachin Kanwal said staff are being trained to capture monkeys. Deputy Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Shahnawaz Ahmad Bhat said the department still intervenes, largely around forest areas, but charges the civic bodies; sterilisation costs ₹700 per monkey. Shimla records 50 to 55 monkey attacks a month, according to municipal officials. Official numbers cited by the paper show Himachal’s estimated macaque population falling from 3,17,512 in 2004 to 2,26,086 in 2013 and 1,36,443 in 2019-20, which the forest department credits largely to sterilisation: 1,86,448 monkeys were sterilised between 2006 and March 2024. Wildlife expert Shaminder Boparai said opinion is divided on whether monkeys should be treated as vermin — animals that may be killed as pests — or protected, and blamed public feeding for drawing them out of forests. A Shimla NGO protested last week demanding ₹5 lakh compensation for the family and action against those who feed monkeys. Under the State’s wildlife compensation policy, severe injury attracts ₹75,000, permanent disability ₹1 lakh and death ₹4 lakh, but officials indicated the family is unlikely to qualify because the species is no longer covered by the Act. The syllabus link is human–wildlife conflict and the division of functions between departments and local bodies.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rhesus macaque protected under Schedule II of the 1972 Act, with forest departments and central funds handling conflict → sterilisation from 2006 cuts Himachal’s estimated population by more than half → the 2022 Amendment rationalises schedules and drops the macaque → responsibility shifts informally to municipal bodies without money or trained staff → a fatal attack leaves the victim’s family outside the wildlife compensation policy

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The 2022 Amendment shrank the Act’s schedules from six to four —** The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 reorganised the schedules so that Schedule I covers species with the highest protection, Schedule II species with lesser protection, Schedule III protected plants, and Schedule IV specimens listed in the appendices of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The old Schedule V, which listed vermin, was abolished. The amendment also aligned the Act with India’s obligations under CITES. Because the Act defines a wild animal by reference to the schedules, a species dropped from them largely falls outside the Act’s protective machinery.

2. **Section 62 lets the Centre declare an animal vermin for a place and a period —** Even after 2022, Section 62 allows the Central Government, by notification, to declare any wild animal other than those in Schedule I to be vermin for a specified area and period, which permits it to be hunted there. Section 11 separately allows the Chief Wildlife Warden to permit the hunting of an animal that has become dangerous to human life. These are the Act’s traditional tools for conflict, and both assume the animal is within the Act in the first place. Himachal Pradesh obtained central vermin notifications for the macaque in parts of the State in the previous decade, though they were for limited areas and periods.

3. **Wildlife is a Concurrent subject, and animal cruelty is also a municipal function —** The 42nd Amendment of 1976 moved forests and the protection of wild animals and birds from the State List to the Concurrent List as entries 17A and 17B. Article 48A directs the State to protect the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife, and Article 51A(g) makes it a fundamental duty of citizens to have compassion for living creatures. The Twelfth Schedule, added by the 74th Amendment, lists “cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals” among the functions that may be devolved to municipalities. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 continues to apply to monkeys whatever their status under the wildlife law.

4. **Sterilisation is the standard non-lethal tool for commensal primates —** Commensal

	animals are those that live alongside humans and feed on human food and waste, as urban macaques do. Sterilisation reduces the population over years without the public controversy of culling, but it needs trained capture teams, veterinary facilities and sustained funding. Its results are slow and depend on covering a large share of breeding females, which is why a gap in funding or institutional responsibility can undo a decade of work.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Human–wildlife conflict is a recurring Mains theme —** The GS3 syllabus covers conservation and disaster management, and questions on human–wildlife conflict have asked candidates to discuss causes and mitigation. The Shimla case adds a governance dimension — the conflict is not in a forest but on a city roof, and the question is which department owns it. 2. **Prelims tests the Act's schedules and sections —** After the 2022 amendment, statement questions on the number of schedules, the fate of the vermin schedule and the Section 62 power are natural targets. The Concurrent List entries 17A and 17B inserted in 1976 are an old favourite in polity questions as well. 3. **Local government functions are part of the GS2 syllabus —** Devolution of powers and finances to local levels is named in GS2. A function transferred to a municipal corporation without funds or staff is a textbook example of the unfunded mandate problem that examiners like candidates to illustrate with a real case.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 reduced the schedules of the Act to four, with Schedule IV covering specimens listed in the CITES appendices. • The separate schedule for vermin was removed by the 2022 amendment, but Section 62 still allows the Central Government to declare a wild animal, other than a Schedule I animal, to be vermin for a specified area and period. • Section 11 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 allows the Chief Wildlife Warden to permit the hunting of a wild animal that has become dangerous to human life. • The 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976 placed forests and the protection of wild animals and birds in the Concurrent List as entries 17A and 17B. • Article 51A(g) makes it a fundamental duty to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures. • The Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution includes "cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals" among municipal functions.
ANALYSIS	1. **Delisting removed the money from a programme that was working —** The population figures show that sterilisation had roughly halved Himachal's estimated macaque numbers between 2004 and 2019-20. The legal change did not end the problem; it ended the forest department's duty and the central funding that paid for the solution. A policy that transfers a function while its budget disappears is not a transfer but an abandonment. The rational reform would have been to move the money with the mandate, or to keep sterilisation as a funded wildlife-management activity regardless of the species' schedule. 2. **Charging municipalities ₹700 per monkey inverts the logic of expertise —** The forest department has the trained capture teams and the veterinary experience, and it now sells them to a civic body that has neither. This creates a market inside government where the poorer institution pays the better-equipped one, and every rupee spent on inter-departmental billing is a rupee not spent on capture. The counter-view is that forest staff are stretched and should concentrate on forests, which is fair. But then the

	State must fund and train a municipal unit before, not after, a death. 3. **Compensation tied to legal status treats identical harm unequally —** A family whose member is killed by a leopard receives ₹4 lakh under the State policy, while a family whose member is killed by macaques may receive nothing, only because of a schedule amendment. From the victim's side the harm is the same and neither family chose the risk. Compensation should follow the nature of the injury and the public character of the hazard, not the taxonomic list. A State could fix this by executive order, without waiting for Parliament. 4. **Feeding is the root cause, and it is a behaviour the law can reach —** Mr. Boparai's point that public feeding draws monkeys out of forests is supported by the pattern of attacks in towns, temples and highways. Municipal bye-laws can prohibit feeding and penalise it, and the NGO's demand for stricter action shows public appetite for enforcement. Enforcement is politically delicate because feeding monkeys has religious associations for many residents, which is also why culling under Section 62 has never been a popular answer. 5. **The debate is framed too narrowly as protection versus vermin —** The choice is not only between a protected animal and a pest. Many countries manage abundant species through a third category — managed wildlife — where the animal is not endangered but the state retains responsibility for population control, conflict response and compensation. India's 2022 rationalisation left no such category, so a species is either protected by the forest department or effectively nobody's. The Shimla death is the cost of that missing middle.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Removing a species from legal protection does not remove the conflict it causes; it only changes who is responsible." Discuss with reference to the rhesus macaque after the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, and suggest an institutional framework for managing conflict with abundant wildlife in urban areas. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Begin with the Shimla case: a 63-year-old woman attacked by macaques on her roof on August 30 and dying on September 5, with the family unlikely to receive compensation because the species was dropped from the Act in 2022. 2. **Body — the legal change —** Explain the four-schedule structure after 2022, the removal of the vermin schedule, the continued Section 62 and Section 11 powers, and the Concurrent List status of wildlife. Show that a delisted species falls outside the forest department's mandate. 3. **Body — the institutional gap —** Use the evidence: municipal bodies lacking funds and trained staff, forest departments charging ₹700 per sterilisation, loss of central funds, 50 to 55 attacks a month in Shimla, and the compensation policy's dependence on legal status. Contrast with the population decline achieved by sterilisation between 2004 and 2019-20. 4. **Body — a framework —** Suggest a managed-wildlife category with funded population control; a joint municipal–forest cell with clear standard operating procedures; compensation based on harm rather than schedule; enforceable anti-feeding bye-laws and waste management; and awareness campaigns at temples and tourist sites. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that conservation law must be paired with conflict governance, and that an abundant species needs management, not neglect.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Municipal Commissioner of Shimla. After this death, residents demand action within a week. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would immediately set up a joint response team with the forest

department, using its trained capture staff under a written arrangement, and publish a helpline for attacks and sightings. I would notify and enforce a ban on feeding monkeys in public places and fix the waste bins and garbage points that attract them. I would ask the State government for a dedicated budget for sterilisation and for an interim ex gratia payment to the family, and report publicly on progress every fortnight.

Q2. As Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, would you argue for putting the macaque back on a schedule?

Approach: Relisting would restore funding and responsibility but would also bring back legal restrictions that made conflict response slow. My preference would be to seek a funded State scheme for managing abundant wildlife, in which the forest department retains technical leadership for population control whatever the species' schedule. I would support this with the population and sterilisation data, which show that the programme worked when it was funded.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it ethical for the State to deny compensation to a family only because an animal's legal status changed?

Approach: It is lawful but hard to defend ethically, because the family's loss is the same and the risk was created by a public hazard, not by the family's choice. Fairness requires treating like cases alike, and a death from a macaque attack is like a death from any other animal attack. The State can use its discretionary relief powers now and amend its policy to base compensation on the harm, which is both humane and inexpensive.

5.3 Delhi Doubles Rooftop-Solar Subsidy to ₹1.56 Lakh, Targets Free Systems for 2.3 Lakh Homes

THE NEWS New Delhi. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday, September 21, launched the registration portal for the Delhi PM Surya Ghar scheme, implemented under the Centre's PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, The Hindu and The Indian Express report. The Centre gives up to ₹78,000 for rooftop solar systems of up to 3 kilowatts (kW, a measure of a system's generating capacity), and the Delhi government will add a matching ₹78,000, so a household can receive up to ₹1.56 lakh. Domestic consumers with average monthly consumption of up to 400 units will get systems of up to 3 kW without any upfront payment, with any gap in cost covered through the scheme. The target in the first phase is free rooftop systems for more than 2.30 lakh households, according to Power Minister Ashish Sood, who said Delhi would become the country's "solar capital". Applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis; the Express says the launch was part of the Seva Sankalp Abhiyan marking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 76th birthday. Consumers register with their contract account number with the distribution company (discom, the utility that supplies power to homes). Authorised vendors will install and maintain systems for five years, after which maintenance moves to the discoms. Assistance for group housing societies has been raised from ₹2,000 per kW to ₹11,000 per kW, and officials want half of consumers to opt for systems of up to 2 kW on smaller rooftops. Households in the 0–200 unit category, whose power is already free, will receive an incentive equal to half the units they save; the Express gives the example that cutting use from 200 to 50 units earns an incentive equal to 75 units. For the 201–400 unit category the existing subsidy of up to ₹800 a month continues on consumption after solar, and above 400 units households get the maximum capital subsidy but lose the electricity subsidy, since eligibility is based on gross consumption. The Express reports that Delhi has only 29,718 solar connections through BSES and Tata Power, with 472 MWp (megawatt-peak, the rated output under ideal sunlight) of capacity, and that officials blame three factors: free electricity up to 200 units removes the incentive to install, many residents live in group housing where consensus is hard, and upfront costs can reach ₹2 lakh for bigger systems. The syllabus link is renewable energy, distributed generation and India's non-fossil targets.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Centre launches PM Surya Ghar in 2024 with capital subsidy capped at ₹78,000 for 3 kW → Delhi lags with under 30,000 connections because free power, group housing and upfront cost blunt the incentive → Delhi matches the central subsidy to ₹1.56 lakh and raises group-housing aid to ₹11,000 per kW → zero-upfront systems for households up to 400 units and a saving incentive for the 0–200 slab → target of 2.3 lakh free rooftop systems in the first phase

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **PM Surya Ghar is a demand-side subsidy scheme for one crore households —** The Union Cabinet approved PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana on February 29, 2024 with an outlay of ₹75,021 crore, according to the Press Information Bureau release retrieved for this card. It aims to install rooftop solar in one crore households and provide up to 300 units of free electricity a month. Central financial assistance covers 60% of system cost for systems up to 2 kW and 40% of the additional cost between 2 and 3 kW, working out to ₹30,000 for 1 kW, ₹60,000 for 2 kW and ₹78,000 for 3 kW, with a cap at 3 kW. The PIB release also provides for a Model Solar Village in each district and a payment-security component for RESCO models. 2. **The Electricity Act, 2003 and the regulators decide how rooftop power is paid for —** Electricity is in the Concurrent List. Under the Electricity Act, 2003, State Electricity Regulatory Commissions fix tariffs and regulate discoms, and in Delhi this is the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission. Net metering — where a meter runs both ways and the consumer is billed only for net consumption — is governed by regulations and by the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, which recognise a consumer's right to become a prosumer, meaning one who both produces and consumes power. 3. **CAPEX and RESCO are the two business models for rooftop solar —** In the CAPEX model the household buys and owns the system, which is where capital subsidies apply. In the RESCO model a renewable energy service company installs and owns the system and sells the power to the household or building under a long-term contract. RESCO suits institutions and group housing that cannot bear upfront costs, but it needs payment security, which is why the central scheme provides for it. 4. **India's non-fossil target is measured in installed capacity —** At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 India announced the target of 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030, and its updated Nationally Determined Contribution of 2022 committed to about 50% of cumulative installed electric power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030 and to reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% from 2005 levels. Rooftop solar is a form of distributed renewable energy — power generated close to where it is used — which reduces transmission losses and the need for land.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Energy infrastructure and renewables are a steady GS3 theme —** GS3 lists infrastructure including energy, and questions on solar energy have asked about India's targets, the International Solar Alliance and the constraints on rooftop adoption. A State-level case with numbers on why adoption lagged is excellent illustration material. 2. **Prelims asks about scheme design, not launch events —** The likely targets are the capacity cap for central assistance, the ministry in charge (the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy), the meaning of net metering and RESCO, and the 2030 non-fossil target. The number of portal registrations in one city is not examinable. 3. **Freebies and fiscal federalism connect this to GS2 —** Delhi's free electricity up to 200 units is precisely what officials blame for weak solar uptake. The interaction between welfare subsidies and green incentives is a live theme in debates on State finances and 'revdi' politics, and an answer that uses this case shows analytical depth.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana was approved by the Union Cabinet on February 29, 2024 with an outlay of ₹75,021 crore to install rooftop solar in one crore households. • Under PM Surya Ghar, central financial assistance is capped at 3 kW, at ₹78,000 for a 3 kW system. • Net metering bills a prosumer only for the difference between electricity drawn from and supplied to the grid.

	● In the RESCO model, a renewable energy service company owns the rooftop system and sells power to the consumer, while in the CAPEX model the consumer owns the system. ● Tariffs for retail electricity supply are determined by State Electricity Regulatory Commissions under the Electricity Act, 2003. ● India's updated NDC of 2022 targets about 50% of cumulative installed electric power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.
ANALYSIS	1. **Delhi is paying to undo the incentive its own free power created —** Officials themselves say that free electricity up to 200 units removes the reason to install solar. The new scheme therefore stacks a capital subsidy on top of a consumption subsidy, which is expensive and conceptually muddled. The smartest element is the incentive of half the units saved for the 0–200 category, because it rewards conservation instead of consumption, reversing the logic of the free slab. Whether it works depends on whether households understand it; incentives that need a worked example to explain often go unused. 2. **The real frontier is group housing, not independent houses —** A large share of Delhi's residents live in group housing societies or rented homes, where there is no individual roof to put panels on. Raising assistance from ₹2,000 to ₹11,000 per kW for societies is the change most likely to move the numbers, but consensus among flat owners, rooftop rights and the division of benefits remain obstacles. Virtual or group net metering, which splits a shared system's output across many meters, would do more for such buildings than any single-household subsidy. 3. **Zero upfront payment shifts the risk to vendors and discoms —** With no upfront payment for households up to 400 units, somebody must finance the gap, and five years of vendor maintenance followed by discom responsibility means the utilities will inherit thousands of small systems. Discoms also lose revenue from their better-paying consumers when those consumers generate their own power. The counter-view is that rooftop generation during the day reduces discoms' costly peak purchases in summer; which effect dominates will depend on tariff design by the regulator. 4. **First-come, first-served favours the informed and the owners —** A portal on a first-come, first-served basis rewards households with internet access, clear property titles and time to navigate the process. Renters, who are often poorer, cannot install rooftop systems at all. If the scheme is to be equitable rather than merely popular, targeted outreach to economically weaker households, whom the government says can receive systems without upfront payment, should be a measured objective with published numbers. 5. **The 2.3 lakh target is ambitious against a base of 29,718 —** Moving from under 30,000 connections to over 2.3 lakh is nearly an eightfold increase. If every system were 3 kW, the target would add up to about 690 MW, more than Delhi's existing 472 MWp, which would matter for a city that draws most of its power from plants outside its borders. The number is achievable only if vendor capacity, discom inspection and metering keep pace; in many States rooftop schemes have stalled at the net-meter installation stage rather than at the subsidy stage.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Rooftop solar has lagged in Indian cities despite generous capital subsidies. Using Delhi's launch of the State component of PM Surya Ghar as an example, examine the economic, institutional and behavioural barriers to distributed solar adoption, and suggest measures to overcome them. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the scheme's design: a central ₹78,000 subsidy for up to 3 kW matched by Delhi to reach ₹1.56 lakh, zero upfront cost for homes up to 400 units, and

	a target of 2.3 lakh free rooftop systems against only 29,718 existing connections. 2. **Body — economic barriers —** Discuss upfront costs of up to ₹2 lakh, the disincentive created by free electricity up to 200 units, discom revenue concerns and financing risk under zero-upfront models. 3. **Body — institutional and behavioural barriers —** Discuss group housing consensus, renters without roofs, net-metering delays, vendor quality and maintenance after five years, and low awareness of incentives such as payment for units saved. 4. **Body — measures —** Suggest virtual and group net metering, RESCO models with payment security for societies, single-window digital approvals with time limits for discoms, quality certification of vendors, targeted outreach to weaker sections and regulatory tariff design that rewards daytime generation. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India's 2030 non-fossil target depends not only on giant solar parks but on millions of small decisions by households, which respond to design and trust as much as to subsidy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You head a Delhi discom. The government expects you to take over maintenance of lakhs of rooftop systems after five years. What do you prepare?** ***Approach:*** I would insist that vendors hand over complete technical records, warranties and inverter data for each installation, and set standards now so that the systems we inherit are serviceable. I would build a maintenance cell or contract it out on performance-based terms, and use smart meters to identify failing systems early. I would also ask the regulator to allow recovery of these costs transparently, so that maintenance does not become an unfunded burden. **Q2. As the officer running the scheme, how would you ensure it reaches economically weaker households rather than only the well-off?** ***Approach:*** I would set a quota or at least a monitored target for weaker-section households and run camps in resettlement colonies with discom and vendor staff present to complete registration on the spot. I would publish ward-wise data on applications and installations each month. For those without suitable roofs, I would explore community systems on public buildings whose benefit is credited to nearby low-income consumers. **Q3. An interview board asks: is it sensible to give free electricity and also subsidise solar panels for the same households?** ***Approach:*** It is sensible only if the solar subsidy gradually replaces the consumption subsidy, because a household that generates its own power no longer needs free grid power. Paying both indefinitely doubles the fiscal cost. Delhi's incentive for units saved points in the right direction, since it rewards reducing grid consumption rather than using more. A clear roadmap to phase down the consumption subsidy as solar spreads would make the policy coherent.

5.4 Alternative Fuels Overtake Petrol in New Car Sales, but CNG and Hybrids Lead, Not EVs

THE NEWS New Delhi. A Data Point analysis in The Hindu by Sachin Swaraj and Gandla Sneha examines what the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) called a "historic fuel crossover" in August 2026. In the passenger vehicles category, which mainly includes cars, FADA data showed that for the first time the share of new vehicles running on alternative fuels (41.95%) overtook the share of petrol vehicles (40.85%); FADA counts "CNG, hybrid and electric combined" as alternative fuels. CNG is compressed natural gas, a fossil fuel that burns cleaner than petrol; a hybrid combines an engine with a battery and electric motor. Across all categories, petrol and diesel still dominate, accounting for 83.5% of the roughly 82 lakh vehicles registered from January to March this year, which the article says is an 11.5

percentage point drop from the same period in 2021, when petrol and diesel accounted for over 95% of 57 lakh vehicles. Electric vehicles account for 10.6% of total registrations, but data from the Vahan portal — the Transport Ministry's national vehicle registration database — shows this is driven mainly by two- and three-wheelers. Two-wheelers make up over 70% of new vehicles, and the EV share among them rose from 6.4% in 2025 to 9.1% in 2026 (till August); the share of petrol two-wheelers has come down to the 90% mark for the first time. Three-wheelers, only 4% of vehicles sold, have transformed fastest: of roughly 9.8 lakh registered till August this year, 60.5% were EVs, and the share of petrol and diesel among them has halved from nearly 30% in 2021 to less than 15% in 2026, while CNG and LPG three-wheelers have also declined this year. In cars, the share of petrol and diesel fell from 86% in 2021 to 61.6% in 2026, but the article says this is mainly due to vehicles using CNG and LPG, not EVs, and that the share of hybrid EVs has stayed at around 8% since 2023. The authors conclude that measures such as ramping up charging infrastructure are needed to accelerate EV adoption among cars. Separately, The Hindu reports that Delhi's Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said 150 electric buses will be launched next month under PM E-Drive, adding to 5,088 electric buses across 40 depots. The syllabus link is transport emissions, energy security and industrial policy for clean mobility.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Subsidy schemes and fuel-price pressure push buyers away from petrol and diesel → three-wheelers, with high daily use, switch to EVs first and reach 60.5% EV share → two-wheeler EV share climbs to 9.1% → car buyers move mainly to CNG and LPG while EV and hybrid shares grow slowly → CNG, hybrid and EV together overtake petrol in August 2026 car sales, masking the slow electrification of cars

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Vahan is the national register, FADA the dealers' voice —** Vahan is the national vehicle registration database operated by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways with the National Informatics Centre, and Sarathi is its counterpart for driving licences. Vehicle registration under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 is a State function performed by regional transport offices, and Vahan integrates their records. FADA is the apex body of automobile dealers and publishes retail sales based on registrations, while SIAM, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, reports factory dispatches to dealers. 2. **India's EV subsidies have moved from FAME to PM E-DRIVE —** The FAME scheme (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles) began in 2015, and FAME-II from 2019 had an outlay of ₹10,000 crore focused on public and shared transport. PM E-DRIVE, approved in September 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,900 crore, supports electric two- and three-wheelers, e-buses, e-trucks, e-ambulances and public charging. The Production Linked Incentive schemes for automobiles and for advanced chemistry cell batteries support manufacturing rather than purchase. 3. **An electric vehicle is not one technology but several —** A battery electric vehicle runs only on a battery charged from the grid. A hybrid electric vehicle combines an internal combustion engine with a battery that is charged by the engine and braking, and cannot be plugged in; a plug-in hybrid has a larger battery that can be charged externally. Strong hybrids can run short distances on electricity alone, while mild hybrids only assist the engine. CNG and LPG vehicles are internal combustion vehicles that burn gaseous fossil fuels. 4. **Emission and efficiency standards set the ceiling on transport pollution —** India leapfrogged from Bharat Stage IV to Bharat Stage VI emission norms nationwide from April 1, 2020. Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms, framed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001, cap the average fuel consumption or carbon dioxide emissions of a manufacturer's whole fleet, which gives carmakers an incentive to sell EVs and hybrids. India's updated NDC commits to reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Electric mobility is asked across GS3 in several forms —** GS3 covers infrastructure, energy and environmental pollution, and questions on electric vehicles have asked about the obstacles to adoption and the role of batteries and critical minerals. Data

	that separates two-wheelers, three-wheelers and cars lets a candidate move beyond generic statements to segment-specific policy. 2. **Prelims tests definitions and schemes —** Expect statements on what a hybrid is, whether CNG is a fossil fuel, which ministry runs Vahan, what CAFE norms regulate and what the FAME and PM E-DRIVE schemes cover. Monthly sales shares are not asked. 3. **Energy security links this story to today's oil shock —** The Indian Express editorial today notes Brent crude at about $102 per barrel, nearly 55% higher than a year ago. Any Mains question on energy security invites a discussion of transport fuel demand, where the segment data in this story is directly useful.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Vahan is the national vehicle registration database of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, and Sarathi is the corresponding database for driving licences. • A hybrid electric vehicle combines an internal combustion engine with a battery and electric motor, while a battery electric vehicle runs only on grid-charged batteries. • Compressed natural gas, used in CNG vehicles, is a fossil fuel consisting mainly of methane. • Bharat Stage VI emission norms were implemented nationwide from April 1, 2020, skipping Bharat Stage V. • Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency norms are framed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001. • PM E-DRIVE, which succeeded FAME-II, supports the purchase of electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, buses and trucks and the creation of public charging infrastructure.
ANALYSIS	1. **"Alternative fuel" is a marketing category, not a climate one —** Clubbing CNG, hybrids and EVs together produces a headline crossover, but CNG and LPG are fossil fuels and hybrids still burn petrol. The article's own data shows that the fall in petrol and diesel cars is mainly a move to gas. That is a genuine improvement in local air pollution, but it is not electrification, and policy that celebrates the combined figure risks mistaking a transition fuel for the destination. 2. **Economics, not ideology, explains which segment electrifies first —** Three-wheelers are commercial vehicles that run many kilometres a day, so the lower running cost of electricity pays back the battery quickly; that is why their EV share has reached 60.5%. Private cars run far less, cost more and need long-range charging, so their payback period is longer. Policy should therefore be segment-specific: purchase subsidies make sense where total cost of ownership is close to parity, while charging infrastructure matters more for cars. 3. **The CNG shift does not escape import dependence —** India imports a large share of its natural gas as liquefied natural gas, and an opinion article in The Economic Times today says LNG and gas-to-urea spreads are already at five to ten times their regular values amid the West Asia conflict. A car fleet that moves from petrol to CNG shifts, rather than removes, exposure to imported hydrocarbons. EVs change the dependence to electricity, which in India is still mainly coal-based but largely domestic; that is an energy-security gain even before it is a climate gain. 4. **The counter-view: an EV on a coal grid is not automatically clean —** Critics note that an electric car charged from a coal-heavy grid can have lifecycle emissions not very different from an efficient hybrid, once battery manufacturing is counted. The answer is that EV emissions fall as the grid decarbonises, while an engine's emissions are fixed

	for its life of fifteen years or more. The strongest case for EVs in Indian cities is local air quality, because tailpipe pollution is removed from where people breathe. 5. **Public transport electrification may matter more than private cars —** Delhi's 5,088 electric buses and 150 more under PM E-Drive carry far more passengers per vehicle than private cars. A modest increase in bus electrification can cut urban emissions faster than a large rise in electric car sales, and it avoids the equity problem of subsidising cars bought by richer households. The segment data therefore argues for putting public money into buses and three-wheelers first.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The August 2026 "fuel crossover", in which alternative-fuel cars outsold petrol cars for the first time, conceals uneven progress across vehicle segments. Critically analyse the pattern of India's transition away from petrol and diesel, and suggest a segment-wise policy for accelerating electric mobility. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Cite FADA's data: alternative fuels at 41.95% of August 2026 passenger vehicle sales against petrol's 40.85%, with CNG, hybrids and EVs counted together, and note that petrol and diesel still account for over 83% of all registrations. 2. **Body — segment picture —** Three-wheelers at 60.5% EV share, two-wheelers rising from 6.4% to 9.1%, and cars where petrol and diesel fell from 86% to 61.6% mainly because of CNG and LPG, with hybrids stuck near 8%. 3. **Body — why the pattern —** Explain total cost of ownership, utilisation rates, upfront prices, charging anxiety, and the role of subsidies under FAME and PM E-DRIVE and fleet-level CAFE norms. Add energy security, noting that CNG depends partly on imported LNG. 4. **Body — segment-wise policy —** For three-wheelers and buses, finance and battery-swapping; for two-wheelers, standards and local manufacturing; for cars, dense public charging, stricter CAFE norms and differential registration fees; across all, grid decarbonisation and battery recycling. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the transition should be judged by electrification and emissions, not by a combined 'alternative fuel' figure, and that public money is best spent where adoption is closest to tipping.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Delhi's Transport Commissioner, how would you use the three-wheeler data to plan policy?** ***Approach:*** Since most new three-wheelers are already electric, my priority would be charging and battery-swapping points at auto stands, metro stations and markets, and quick permits for electric autos. I would work with discoms on off-peak charging tariffs and with banks on loans for drivers who are replacing older CNG autos. I would also track safety and battery disposal, since a fast-growing fleet brings new risks. **Q2. You are in the Ministry of Heavy Industries. Should subsidies continue for electric two-wheelers when their share is rising on its own?** ***Approach:*** Subsidies should taper as a segment approaches cost parity, so that public money moves to where it can change behaviour. For two-wheelers, a predictable phase-down schedule announced in advance would avoid sudden market shocks. The savings could go to charging infrastructure and electric buses, where the social return is higher. **Q3. An interview board asks: is CNG a friend or a foe of electric mobility?** ***Approach:*** CNG has been a friend of clean air, as Delhi's shift of buses and autos to CNG after the Supreme Court's orders showed. But as a long-term fuel it can lock in engines and pipelines that delay electrification and it depends partly on imported gas. The

	sensible view is to treat CNG as a bridge for segments where EVs are not yet viable, not as the destination.

6. Health & Life Sciences

Today's three health stories are about the same failure seen from three ends: the system can detect a danger but has no clean power to stop it. Indian scientists show that a hospital fungus is beating the very tests doctors use to dose it; the regulator admits it can cancel a device-maker's licence but cannot explicitly order a defective implant off the shelves; and the Health Ministry, unable to stop chemists selling habit-forming drugs to children, wants a camera to do what inspection has not. In each case the gap is not knowledge but enforceable procedure, and that is where a future administrator will spend most of his working life.

6.1 Indian Study Finds 90% of Candida auris Isolates Resist Azoles, Exposing Gaps in Dosing Tests

THE NEWS Hyderabad / Bengaluru. A study published in Nature Communications by Kaustuv Sanyal and his research associate Aswathy Narayanan of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, working with collaborators at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Thiruvananthapuram, has characterised clinical isolates of Candida auris from across India, The Hindu's science page reports in an article by Somdatta Karak, who heads science communication at CSIR-CCMB. C. auris is a yeast — a fungus that lives as single oval cells, unlike moulds, which grow in strands — that is emerging as a multidrug-resistant pathogen in intensive care units. It enters the bloodstream and causes severe infections, most of which cannot be treated with available antifungals; Shivaprakash Rudramurthy, Professor of medical mycology at PGIMER, Chandigarh, puts mortality at 30%-40%. The first report of the fungus was from Japan in 2009. The isolates came from PGIMER's repository, begun some 25 years ago because most Indian hospitals cannot identify fungal pathogens, and which now holds 15,000 clinical fungal isolates; Professor Rudramurthy says roughly 20% of infections reported in hospitals are fungal. "More than 90% clinical isolates of C. auris are resistant to common azole-based antifungals, such as fluconazole," Professor Sanyal said; some 30% resist the polyenes, and most still respond to the echinocandins. The mechanisms were found in the genome. Azoles and polyenes attack ergosterol, a fat in the cell membrane; the fungus responds to fluconazole by making extra copies of the Erg11 gene and producing more ergosterol. Echinocandins such as caspofungin attack the cell wall; mutations in the Fks1 gene let the fungus survive caspofungin at up to 16 µg/ml, while clinicians test susceptibility only up to 2 µg/mL, the limit defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and followed globally. Professor Sanyal suggests raising the test limit above 16 µg/ml. Even without mutations, the fungus survives exceptionally high caspofungin doses by producing extra chitin — a paradox called the Eagle effect, after U.S. pathologist Harry Eagle. Sriram Varahan of CSIR-CCMB links the rise of such fungi to the "fungal infection–mammalian selection hypothesis": fungi grow best below 30°C, and global warming selects heat-tolerant strains able to survive the human body's 37°C. He argues for targeting less critical pathways rather than an "arms race". The syllabus link is antimicrobial resistance, public health capacity and biotechnology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Fungi historically unable to survive human body temperature → warming selects heat-tolerant species and C. auris emerges, first reported in Japan in 2009 → heavy antifungal use in ICUs drives Erg11 duplication and Fks1 mutations → over 90% of Indian isolates resist azoles while standard tests stop at 2 µg/mL → Indian researchers show tests may understate resistance and call for new testing limits and gentler drug strategies

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Antimicrobial resistance covers fungi, not only bacteria —** Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the ability of bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites to survive medicines designed to kill them, and the World Health Organization lists it among the top global public health threats. India adopted a National Action Plan on AMR in 2017 built on the One Health approach, which treats human, animal and environmental health as linked. The Indian Council of Medical Research runs an AMR Surveillance and Research Network of tertiary hospitals that monitors resistance trends. Fungal resistance is less tracked than bacterial resistance, partly because many hospitals cannot culture and identify fungi at all. 2. **WHO's first fungal priority list put Candida auris in the critical group —** In October 2022 the WHO published its first Fungal Priority Pathogens List, grading 19 fungi into critical, high and medium priority to guide research and public health action. Candida auris was placed in the critical group, along with Cryptococcus neoformans, Aspergillus

fumigatus and Candida albicans. The list was a response to the rise of invasive fungal infections among immunocompromised patients, including those in ICUs, cancer and transplant patients and people with HIV. India's experience with mucormycosis during the COVID-19 second wave in 2021, when several States declared it a notifiable disease, showed how quickly a fungal threat can overwhelm hospitals.

3. **Three drug classes, two targets: why the cell wall matters —** Antifungals are few because fungal cells, like human cells, are eukaryotic, so drugs that harm the fungus often harm the patient. Azoles such as fluconazole block the making of ergosterol, the fungal counterpart of cholesterol in the cell membrane, while polyenes such as amphotericin B bind to ergosterol and punch holes in the membrane. Echinocandins such as caspofungin inhibit the enzyme that builds glucan in the fungal cell wall, a structure human cells do not have, which is why they are the last line of defence against resistant Candida. When a pathogen resists all three classes, clinicians have almost nothing left.
4. **Breakpoints decide treatment, and the Eagle effect breaks the simple rule —** A susceptibility test measures the minimum inhibitory concentration — the lowest drug concentration that stops a microbe's growth — and compares it with a "breakpoint" that classifies the microbe as susceptible or resistant. If the tested range is too narrow, a resistant strain can be wrongly reported and a patient under-dosed. The Eagle effect, first observed with penicillin, is the paradox in which a microbe survives better at very high drug concentrations than at moderate ones. It means that simply raising the dose is not always the answer, which is why combination therapy is advocated.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **AMR and biotechnology sit in both GS2 and GS3 —** GS2 covers issues relating to the development and management of health, and GS3 covers science and technology developments and their applications in everyday life. UPSC has asked about the causes of antibiotic resistance and the role of over-the-counter sales, and Prelims has tested which microbes cause which diseases and how drugs act. A fungal pathogen question is the natural next step as the WHO's fungal list gains prominence.
2. **Climate–health linkages are a rising theme —** The examiner increasingly asks how climate change affects disease — vector ranges, heat stress and new pathogens. The fungal–mammalian selection hypothesis is a precise, citable example that turns a vague claim about "climate and health" into an argument with a mechanism.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Candida auris is a yeast, a single-celled fungus, and was first reported from Japan in 2009.
- Azole and polyene antifungals act on ergosterol in the fungal cell membrane, while echinocandins such as caspofungin act on the fungal cell wall.
- The WHO Fungal Priority Pathogens List of 2022 placed Candida auris in its critical priority group.
- The Eagle effect refers to paradoxical survival of a microbe at very high concentrations of a drug that kills it at lower concentrations.
- India's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, adopted in 2017, is based on the One Health approach linking human, animal and environmental health.
- Dermatophytosis, a superficial fungal infection of skin, hair and nails, is caused by moulds called dermatophytes.

ANALYSIS

1. **The most dangerous finding is about the test, not the fungus —** That C. auris resists azoles was already known worldwide; what the Indian study adds is evidence that the global susceptibility test may be reporting some strains as treatable when they are not.

	If laboratories stop testing at 2 µg/mL while Fks1 mutants survive 16 µg/ml, a patient can be given the right drug at the wrong dose, and the drug is then blamed for failing. This is a quiet form of harm because it looks like good practice. The policy lesson is that India cannot simply import breakpoints set for other populations; it needs the capacity to validate them against its own isolates. 2. **A 25-year freezer is national infrastructure —** The study was possible only because PGIMER began storing fungal isolates a quarter-century ago and now shares 15,000 of them free of cost. Such biorepositories rarely appear in budget speeches, yet they are what allow Indian science to answer Indian questions instead of extrapolating from foreign data. The counter-view is that repositories are expensive to maintain and their pay-off is uncertain. But the pay-off here is exactly the kind no private actor would fund: evidence that changes public treatment protocols. 3. **Diagnosis is the real bottleneck in Indian hospitals —** Professor Rudramurthy's statement that most hospitals cannot identify fungal pathogens explains why resistance spreads unseen: a clinician who cannot name the fungus prescribes the cheapest broad antifungal, usually an azole, and so selects for the resistance the study found. The fix is not only new drugs but district-level mycology capacity, referral links to reference laboratories and inclusion of fungi in AMR surveillance. This is an argument for public laboratories, not for more prescriptions. 4. **Dr. Varahan's "gentler" strategy is scientifically attractive but commercially hard —** Targeting pathways that make a fungus harmful without killing it — an approach known in bacteria as anti-virulence therapy — reduces the pressure that selects for resistance. The difficulty is that such drugs are harder to prove effective in trials and earn less money, because they do not produce the dramatic cure regulators and companies prefer. Without public or philanthropic funding, the arms race Dr. Varahan criticises will continue by default. Professor Sanyal's combination-therapy approach is the more immediately usable of the two ideas. 5. **The climate hypothesis should be treated as a hypothesis —** The article is careful to say the cause of the rise of pathogenic fungi "remains unresolved". The fungal–mammalian selection idea is plausible and widely discussed, but an answer that presents it as settled overstates the evidence. Hospital practices — broad-spectrum antibiotic use, invasive devices, long ICU stays — are at least as important and more directly controllable. A good answer names both and gives priority to what policy can change now.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Antimicrobial resistance is no longer only a bacterial problem." In the light of recent Indian research on Candida auris, discuss the challenges India faces in detecting and treating drug-resistant fungal infections, and suggest measures to strengthen its response. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define AMR and note that C. auris, placed in the WHO's critical fungal priority group in 2022, causes bloodstream infections with a 30%-40% mortality rate, as cited by PGIMER; state the Indian finding that over 90% of isolates resist azoles. 2. **Body — the scientific challenge —** Explain the three antifungal classes and their targets, the mechanisms found (Erg11 duplication, Fks1 mutations), the gap between the 2 µg/mL testing limit and survival at 16 µg/ml, and the Eagle effect. 3. **Body — the system challenge —** Cover weak diagnostic capacity in most hospitals, empirical azole use, limited fungal surveillance within AMR networks, few new drugs in development and the possible role of warming in selecting heat-tolerant fungi. 4. **Body — measures —** Suggest regional mycology reference laboratories, inclusion of fungi in AMR surveillance and hospital infection-control audits, India-specific validation

	of breakpoints, antifungal stewardship in ICUs, public funding for repositories and for combination and anti-virulence research, under the One Health framework of the national AMR plan. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the fight against resistance is won or lost in laboratories and ICU protocols, and that India's own data, not imported assumptions, must guide treatment.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Medical Superintendent of a district hospital, you learn that three ICU patients have Candida auris infections. What do you do in the first week?** ***Approach:*** I would treat it as an outbreak: isolate or cohort the patients, enforce contact precautions and strict hand hygiene, and have surfaces and shared equipment disinfected, since the fungus persists in the environment. I would send isolates to a reference laboratory for species confirmation and full susceptibility testing, and inform the State health authorities. I would review antifungal prescribing in the ICU with the infection-control committee. Families of affected patients should be told honestly what the infection is and what is being done. **Q2. A State Health Secretary asks whether scarce funds should go to a fungal reference laboratory or to buying more antifungal drugs. What do you advise?** ***Approach:*** Buying drugs without being able to identify the fungus is how resistance is produced, so a laboratory gives more value per rupee. One well-equipped regional laboratory serving several districts, with a transport system for samples, can guide treatment across hundreds of beds. Drugs are still needed, but they should be bought against a formulary informed by local resistance data. I would recommend a phased plan that funds the laboratory first and links drug procurement to its findings. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India set its own laboratory standards when global bodies already publish them?** ***Approach:*** India should follow global standards as the baseline, because they allow data to be compared across countries. But where Indian evidence shows that a standard misses local resistance patterns, the national regulator and ICMR should be able to issue supplementary guidance. Science is universal, but pathogens are local, and a protocol that fails Indian patients is not neutral. The right course is to publish the Indian data and engage the global bodies to revise the standard for everyone.

6.2 Centre Moves to Let Regulators Halt Sale and Order Destruction of Unsafe Medical Devices

THE NEWS New Delhi. The government is considering amending the Medical Devices Rules, 2017 to make it easier for regulators to stop the manufacture and sale or distribution, and to order the destruction, of medical devices found to be unsafe, defective, substandard or spurious, The Economic Times reports in a story by Teena Thacker based on an official document it has seen. Under the current rules, licensing authorities can only suspend or cancel a licence if a licensee contravenes the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 or the Medical Devices Rules, 2017; there are no provisions for stronger steps. The proposal to amend Rule 30(1) has been placed before the Drugs Consultative Committee, a body of experts, for deliberation and recommendation. It seeks to explicitly empower State licensing authorities and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), the national regulator, to direct a licensee to stop production and sale or distribution of the device concerned. State and central authorities may also be empowered to direct destruction of devices and stocks wherever considered necessary, in the manner specified by the regulator; according to the report, destruction would take place under the supervision of a medical device officer. The document says there may be cases where devices contravene statutory requirements and their continued manufacture, sale or distribution may be prejudicial to “public health”, and that “effective enforcement requires not only regulatory action against the licence (holder) but also an explicit provision enabling the licensing authority to direct cessation of manufacture, sale or distribution”. It adds that without such a provision the existing Rule 30(1) “may lead to ambiguity in the exercise of regulatory powers and difficulties in taking uniform action". A person aware of the matter told ET that devices "ranging from implants and surgical instruments to diagnostic equipment and consumables" are routinely used in critical care settings where defective products pose significant risks, and that supervised destruction would reduce the chance of unsafe products remaining in circulation. In plain words, a regulator today can punish the company but cannot clearly order that the faulty product itself be pulled out of use. The syllabus link is health regulation, patient safety and the design of regulatory institutions.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Medical devices long regulated loosely as a subset of drugs → Medical Devices Rules, 2017 create a risk-based licensing regime under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 → Rule 30(1) lets authorities act only against the licence, not the product → unsafe devices can stay in circulation after a licence action, with non-uniform action across States → Centre proposes explicit stop-sale and supervised-destruction powers, now before the Drugs Consultative Committee

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **Devices are regulated under a drug law, through a notification route —** The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines "drug" to include devices intended for internal or external use in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of disease that the Central Government notifies. Using this power, the Centre framed the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, which came into force on 1 January 2018, and later brought all medical devices within the regulatory net in phases. India still has no separate statute for devices, which is why rules made under a 1940 drug law must stretch to cover implants, software-driven equipment and diagnostic kits. 2. **The 2017 Rules classify devices by risk and split licensing between Centre and States —** The Medical Devices Rules, 2017 classify devices into four classes on the basis of risk: Class A (low risk), Class B (low-moderate), Class C (moderate-high) and Class D (high risk). Manufacturing licences for Class A and B devices are granted by the State Licensing Authority, while those for Class C and D devices, and all imports, are granted by the Central Licensing Authority, the Drugs Controller General of India who heads CDSCO. The Rules also provide for notified bodies to audit manufacturers, for clinical investigation of new devices and for medical device officers to inspect and sample. 3. **The Drugs Consultative Committee exists to secure uniformity across States —** Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 constitutes the Drugs Technical Advisory Board to advise on technical matters, and Section 7 constitutes the Drugs Consultative Committee, with representatives of the Centre and every State, to advise on securing uniformity in the administration of the Act throughout India. Uniformity matters because drug control is administered largely by State drug controllers, while the Centre regulates new drugs, imports and high-risk devices. Rules under the Act are made by the Central Government after consulting the Board. 4. **A recall power acts on the product; a licence power acts on the firm —** Regulatory law distinguishes between sanctions on a licensee — suspension, cancellation, prosecution — and measures on a product already in the market, such as a stop-sale order, a recall and supervised destruction. International practice treats the second set as essential for devices, because implants and equipment remain in hospitals long after a licence is cancelled. Supervised destruction with documentation prevents a withdrawn product from being quietly resold, which is a known risk in fragmented supply chains.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Regulatory capacity in health is a GS2 staple —** The GS2 syllabus covers statutory, regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies and issues relating to health. Mains has asked about the quality of drug regulation, and the faulty hip-implant controversy of the last decade and cough-syrup deaths linked to Indian exports are standard examples. This amendment is a concrete instance of closing a statutory gap. 2. **Prelims likes the classification and the licensing authority —** Questions on which authority licenses which class of device, on the parent Act of CDSCO and on the difference between the Drugs Technical Advisory Board and the Drugs Consultative

	Committee are fair game. The four risk classes and the Centre–State split should be memorised.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Medical Devices Rules, 2017, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, came into force on 1 January 2018. • The Medical Devices Rules, 2017 classify devices into Classes A, B, C and D in ascending order of risk. • Manufacturing licences for Class A and Class B medical devices are issued by the State Licensing Authority, and for Class C and Class D devices by the Central Licensing Authority. • The Drugs Consultative Committee is constituted under Section 7 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 to advise on uniformity of administration across India. • The Drugs Technical Advisory Board is constituted under Section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. • The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India, functions under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
ANALYSIS	1. **The amendment fixes a gap that should never have existed —** A regulator that can cancel a licence but cannot order the product off the shelf protects the licence register more than the patient. The gap is a legacy of regulating devices through a drug law, where the typical remedy was to stop a manufacturer and let existing stock be sold down. For an implant or a diagnostic kit, the stock in hospitals is the risk. The proposal is therefore less a tightening than a correction of a design error. 2. **Uniformity across States is the more important half of the proposal —** The document's complaint about "difficulties in taking uniform action" is revealing: when a defective device is found in one State, action elsewhere depends on the energy of each State drug controller. An explicit power held by both State authorities and CDSCO, with a specified procedure, allows a nationwide stop-sale to be issued and followed. The risk is the opposite problem — two authorities issuing inconsistent orders — so the amendment should state which authority leads when a device crosses State lines. 3. **Stronger powers need due process to survive court challenge —** An order to destroy stock is a serious interference with property and trade, protected by Article 19(1)(g) and Article 300A, and manufacturers will challenge orders made without reasons or hearing. The amendment is more likely to hold if it provides for a written reasoned order, an opportunity to be heard except in urgent cases, testing by a notified laboratory and an appeal. Due process is not a concession to industry; it is what makes the power usable. 4. **A power to recall is only as good as the ability to trace —** Stopping sale is easy to write and hard to execute if nobody knows which hospitals received a particular batch. Effective recall requires unique device identification, distributor records and hospital implant registries that link a patient to the device inside her body. Without such traceability, the new power will remove what is in warehouses but not what is already in patients. The counter-view is that traceability costs small manufacturers money, which is why it should be phased by risk class. 5. **Rule-making under a 1940 Act is reaching its limits —** Each new problem with devices is being solved by amending subordinate rules, which can be done quickly but rests on a statute written before modern devices existed. A separate law on medical devices, with its own definitions, recall and compensation provisions, has been discussed for years. The present amendment is a sensible interim step, but it also shows why a

	dedicated statute would give regulators clearer authority and patients clearer rights.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India regulates medical devices through a law written for drugs in 1940." In the context of the proposed amendment to Rule 30(1) of the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, examine the gaps in India's medical device regulation and suggest reforms to protect patient safety. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the proposal: explicit power for State licensing authorities and CDSCO to stop manufacture and sale of unsafe, defective, substandard or spurious devices and to order supervised destruction, replacing a regime that allowed only licence suspension or cancellation. 2. **Body — the present framework —** Explain the notification route under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the Medical Devices Rules, 2017 with Classes A-D and the Centre–State split in licensing, and the roles of the Drugs Technical Advisory Board and Drugs Consultative Committee. 3. **Body — the gaps —** Cover the absence of product-level powers, non-uniform action across States, weak traceability and post-market surveillance, lack of a compensation mechanism for patients harmed by devices, and dependence on subordinate legislation. 4. **Body — reforms —** Suggest the stop-sale and destruction power with reasoned orders and appeal, a lead-authority rule for inter-State action, unique device identification and implant registries, mandatory adverse-event reporting, a patient compensation framework and, in the longer term, a separate medical devices law. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that patient safety depends on the ability to act on the product, not merely on the paperwork of the producer, and that the amendment should be the start of a modern device regime.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a State Drugs Controller, you find a batch of substandard surgical staplers already supplied to 40 hospitals. What do you do under the proposed rules?** ***Approach:*** I would issue a reasoned stop-sale order to the licensee and distributors, inform CDSCO and other States so that action is uniform, and ask the licensee to provide batch-wise supply records. Hospitals would be told to quarantine the batch and report any adverse events. Seized stock would be destroyed only under a medical device officer's supervision, with documentation. I would also check whether patients were harmed and whether the licence itself needs to be suspended. **Q2. A manufacturer argues that an order to destroy stock before the final test report is arbitrary. How would you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would accept that destruction is irreversible and should normally follow confirmed test results. The immediate step should be quarantine and stop-sale, which prevent harm without destroying property, while samples are tested at a notified laboratory. If the test confirms the defect, destruction follows with a written order and an opportunity to be heard. Graduated steps protect the patient and also make the order defensible in court. **Q3. An interview board asks: should the Centre take over all medical device regulation from the States?** ***Approach:*** Complete centralisation would overload CDSCO and remove the inspectors who are closest to manufacturers and hospitals. The better model is shared responsibility with clear rules: the Centre sets standards, licenses high-risk devices and coordinates national recalls, while States license low-risk devices and enforce on the ground. The weakness today is not the division itself but the lack of uniform procedure,

which is what the Drugs Consultative Committee exists to secure.

6.3 Health Ministry Drafts Mandatory CCTV at Chemists to Stop Prescription-Drug Sales to Children

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Union Health Ministry has proposed mandatory CCTV surveillance at medical stores to curb the abuse of prescription drugs, The Indian Express reports in an explainer by Anonna Dutt dated September 21. A draft notification requires recordings to be kept for three months. The Ministry said the measure would ensure stricter control over prescription medicines, especially habit-forming drugs listed under Schedule X of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, and that it seeks to address concerns over the "unauthorised access to and sale of Schedule H, H1 and X drugs". These schedules are lists in the Rules that fix how a medicine may be sold: Schedule H drugs, such as many antibiotics and steroids, cannot be sold without a prescription from a registered medical practitioner; Schedule H1 drugs, such as certain antibiotics and anti-TB medicines, carry additional record-keeping requirements; and Schedule X is a more tightly controlled category that includes some psychotropic medicines. The measure was first proposed in 2021 to prevent the abuse of drugs by children. H.G. Koshia, identified by the paper as head of the Drugs Consultative Committee of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, said round-the-clock surveillance would "create fear" among store owners and pharmacists so that they would not sell such medicines to children without a prescription; the footage is mainly meant to verify whether a sale to a minor took place, and while routine inspection every three months may be difficult, data can be retrieved when there is a complaint. The paper cites a comprehensive AIIMS study of drug use published in 2019: opioid use — heroin, pharmaceutical opioids in strong painkillers, and opium — is the second-most common addiction among children, affecting nearly 1.8% of them, followed by alcohol (1.3%) and inhalants (1.17%), the only form more common in children than adults. Of an estimated 2.3 crore opioid users, 25 lakh depend on pharmaceutical opioids and 63 lakh on heroin, according to the study. The All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists objects to the cost for small stores, rural power and connectivity failures and, "most importantly", patient privacy. "Stores might have to shell out nearly a lakh... How can a store with, say, sales of Rs 5,000 to 10,000 do that?" asked its general secretary Rajeev Singhal. The syllabus link is health regulation, child protection and the right to privacy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Prescription-only schedules exist on paper under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 → over-the-counter sale without prescription remains common and inspections are infrequent → the 2019 AIIMS survey records opioid and inhalant use among children → CCTV surveillance first proposed in 2021 and approved by the Drugs Consultative Committee earlier this year → draft notification mandates cameras and three-month storage while chemists cite cost, connectivity and privacy

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Drug schedules decide who may sell what, and on what paper —** The Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, made under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, place medicines in schedules that govern labelling, sale and record-keeping. Schedule H drugs may be sold by retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner and must carry the "Rx" warning. Schedule H1, added in 2013 to curb misuse of certain antibiotics, anti-TB drugs and habit-forming medicines, requires the chemist to keep a separate register with the prescriber's name, patient's name, drug and quantity, and its label carries a boxed red warning. Schedule X covers narcotic and psychotropic medicines with the strictest controls, including a copy of the prescription retained by the chemist and separate stock records.

2. **The NDPS Act runs alongside the drug law —** The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 regulates narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and punishes illicit trafficking, while permitting their medical and scientific use under licence. Many medicines in Schedule X are also psychotropic substances under the NDPS Act, so a chemist who sells them illegally may face action under both laws. The Act gives effect to India's obligations under the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971. The Narcotics Control Bureau, set up in 1986, is the nodal coordinating agency.

	3. **The national survey that underpins today's figures —** The 2019 report on the Magnitude of Substance Use in India was prepared by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of AIIMS, New Delhi, for the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which is the nodal ministry for drug demand reduction. It is the most comprehensive national survey of drug use and covers both adults and children aged 10-17. The Ministry runs the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan, launched in 2020, and a National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction. Supply control, by contrast, is the domain of drug regulators and law enforcement. 4. **Surveillance must pass the Puttaswamy test —** In Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), a nine-judge Bench held privacy to be a fundamental right under Article 21, and any intrusion must satisfy legality, a legitimate aim and proportionality. Video of a person buying medicines reveals health information, which is sensitive by nature. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 requires that personal data be processed for a lawful purpose, with security safeguards and limits on retention. A camera mandate is therefore constitutionally possible but must be backed by law, narrowly purposed and protected against misuse.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Drug abuse and child protection are linked themes across GS papers —** GS2 covers vulnerable sections and health; GS3 covers the linkages of organised crime and drug trafficking. UPSC has asked about the drug problem in Punjab and the North-East and about the NDPS framework. This story allows an answer to move from trafficking to the legal pharmaceutical supply chain, which is often ignored. 2. **Privacy versus public interest is a recurring ethics frame —** Since Puttaswamy, questions on surveillance, Aadhaar and data protection ask candidates to weigh a legitimate aim against intrusion. A CCTV mandate at chemists is a compact case for applying the proportionality test in GS2 and in GS4.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Schedules H, H1 and X are part of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, framed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. • Schedule H drugs can be sold by retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner. • Schedule H1 imposes additional record-keeping on chemists and covers certain antibiotics, anti-TB drugs and habit-forming medicines. • Schedule X covers narcotic and psychotropic medicines subject to the strictest controls on sale and storage. • The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act was enacted in 1985, and the Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted in 1986. • The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal ministry for drug demand reduction and runs the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan. • The Supreme Court declared privacy a fundamental right under Article 21 in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017).
ANALYSIS	1. **The camera is a confession that the prescription register failed —** Schedule H1 already requires chemists to record the prescriber, the patient and the quantity for every sale; if those registers were checked, a camera would add little. The Ministry's own official says inspection every three months is difficult, which means the problem is inspector capacity, not the absence of evidence. A camera that is examined only on complaint will deter only where complaints are likely, which is rarely the case when the buyer is a child. The policy therefore substitutes a cheap-looking technology for an expensive but necessary inspection cadre. 2. **Deterrence by fear works only if footage is actually used —** Mr. Koshia's aim — that

	chemists be afraid to sell without a prescription — is a legitimate theory of deterrence, and it can work in towns where drug inspectors are active and parents or schools complain. But deterrence depends on perceived probability of detection. If chemists learn that no one reviews footage, the cameras will become part of the furniture. The draft should specify how footage will be sampled, by whom, and with what penalties, or the measure will impose cost without effect. 3. **The privacy objection is serious, but it argues for design, not abandonment —** Video of customers buying contraceptives, HIV drugs or psychiatric medicines is precisely the kind of data whose leak causes harm. Yet privacy law does not forbid surveillance; it requires a legal basis, a limited purpose and safeguards. A defensible rule would place cameras over the counter rather than on the customer's face, restrict access to authorised officers on a specific complaint, prohibit use for any other purpose and delete footage after the three-month period. The chemists' organisation is right to raise privacy, but it may also be using patients' privacy to protect its members' convenience. 4. **Cost falls hardest where supervision is weakest —** A one-time cost of nearly a lakh is significant for a rural store with daily sales of a few thousand rupees, and rural areas also have the power and connectivity problems the chemists cite. The perverse outcome could be that urban chain pharmacies comply easily while rural stores either close — reducing access to legitimate medicines — or ignore the rule. A risk-based approach, requiring cameras first for stores that stock Schedule X drugs or that have past violations, would place the burden where the risk is. 5. **Children's drug use is a demand problem too —** The 2019 survey shows that inhalants are the only substance more commonly used by children than by adults, and inhalants are bought at hardware and stationery shops, not chemists. Opioid dependence is dominated by heroin, which is not sold at medical stores at all. Controlling chemists matters for pharmaceutical opioids and sedatives, but a policy that looks only at the counter will miss most of the harm. School counselling, family support and treatment capacity are the other half of any credible response.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Examine the proposal to mandate CCTV surveillance at medical stores to curb the sale of prescription drugs to minors. Is it a proportionate response to the problem of prescription drug abuse among children? Suggest complementary measures. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the draft notification: mandatory CCTV at medical stores, three-month retention, aimed at unauthorised sale of Schedule H, H1 and X drugs, first proposed in 2021 to protect children. 2. **Body — the case for —** Explain the schedules and their prescription requirements, cite the 2019 AIIMS survey figures on opioid and inhalant use among children, and argue that footage creates verifiable evidence where inspections are rare and deters sales without prescription. 3. **Body — the case against —** Cover the cost to small and rural stores, power and connectivity constraints, patient privacy under Puttaswamy and the DPDP Act, 2023, and the risk that unreviewed footage produces no deterrence. 4. **Body — proportionality and complements —** Apply the legality–aim–proportionality test; suggest cameras focused on the counter with restricted access and deletion, a risk-based rollout, e-prescription and app-based tracking of Schedule X sales, more drug inspectors and demand-side measures under the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the measure can be proportionate if narrowly designed,

	but that enforcement capacity and demand reduction, not cameras alone, will decide whether children are protected.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a District Drugs Inspector, you receive a complaint that a chemist sold a Schedule H1 cough syrup to a 14-year-old. How do you proceed?** ***Approach:*** I would inspect the store promptly, check the Schedule H1 register for the sale and ask for the corresponding prescription, and, where cameras exist, secure the relevant footage under a written requisition. I would take a statement from the complainant with a parent present and keep the child's identity confidential. If the violation is established, I would recommend suspension of the licence and initiate prosecution under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. I would also inform the child protection unit so that the child receives counselling. **Q2. The chemists' association in your district threatens a strike against the CCTV rule. What would you do as District Collector?** ***Approach:*** I would meet the association to understand specific concerns, such as cost and privacy, and explain the legal basis and the safeguards in the rule. Where the concern is cost for very small stores, I could explore phased compliance or bank-linked finance. I would make clear that essential medicine supply cannot be disrupted and arrange alternative supply through Jan Aushadhi Kendras and hospital pharmacies. Dialogue is the first step, but the rule, once notified, must be implemented. **Q3. An interview board asks: is it ethical to make small traders pay for a surveillance system meant to catch a few wrongdoers?** ***Approach:*** Every licensing regime asks the honest majority to bear some compliance cost because the regulator cannot tell in advance who will break the rule. The ethical test is whether the cost is proportionate to the harm prevented and fairly distributed. Selling habit-forming drugs to children causes grave harm, so some cost is justified, but a flat mandate that ignores the size of a store is unfair. A risk-based rule with support for the smallest stores meets both the ethical and the practical test.

7. Science & Technology

Today's technology stories share one uncomfortable question: who gets to test the machine before the public trusts it? India's human spaceflight programme answers it the hard way, by building and drop-testing its own parachutes; on frontier artificial intelligence, India is still asking to be let into the testing room; and on the data centres that will run that intelligence, the capital, land, power and water are being committed now, largely by foreign firms. Self-reliance in technology is less about owning the product than about owning the right to check it.

7.1 Gaganyaan Crew Module to Land on Two Drogues and Three Main Parachutes Built by ADRDE

THE NEWS New Delhi / Thiruvananthapuram. In an explainer in The Hindu, Unnikrishnan Nair S. — former director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, and founding director of ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre — sets out how the Gaganyaan crew module, the capsule in which Indian astronauts will ride, will slow down for a safe landing. Any spacecraft re-entering the atmosphere loses much of its velocity through atmospheric drag, but parachutes are needed for a gentle touchdown on land or sea. The system uses three kinds of chute: a pilot chute, a small parachute that pulls out the bigger ones; a drogue chute, deployed early to stabilise the module and cut its speed; and the main chute, with a wide canopy, for the final phase. Because the blunt module leaves a turbulent wake, chutes must be ejected through it quickly, and are generally deployed below the speed of sound. In the lower atmosphere the module will be moving at around 170 m/s, and opening the full main parachute at once would cause a high "opening shock" that could shred the fabric or subject the crew to dangerous deceleration. Staging increases chute diameter in steps, and "reefing" — a cord wound around the canopy, cut by a timed cutter after a preset delay — stops a chute from opening too fast. The Gaganyaan crew module has two drogue chutes deployed by mortars and three main chutes deployed by mortar-ejected pilot chutes; if one main parachute fails, the remaining two are fully capable of a safe touchdown. The developing agency is the Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE), Agra, a DRDO laboratory. Testing uses the rail track rocket sled (RTRS) at the Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory, Chandigarh, drops from helicopters or aircraft, and small rocket-powered test vehicles. After splashdown, pyro cutters detach the canopy so that wind does not drag or capsize the module; Kevlar, Nomex and nylon are the main materials. ISRO's website records that it carried out the first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) on 24 August 2025 at Sriharikota, dropping a simulated crew module of about 4.8 tonnes from about 3 km from an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter, with ten parachutes of four types and a final descent velocity of about 8 m/s. The syllabus link is space technology, indigenisation and human spaceflight.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India announces a human spaceflight programme and sets up ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre → crew safety demands redundant recovery systems that no foreign partner supplies off the shelf → DRDO's ADRDE develops a staged pilot–drogue–main parachute system with reefing → ISRO completes the first Integrated Air Drop Test in August 2025 and continues sled and drop testing → the system must prove it can survive a single main-chute failure before a crewed flight

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Gaganyaan is India's route to independent human spaceflight —** The Gaganyaan programme aims to demonstrate India's capability to send a crew of astronauts to low earth orbit, at about 400 km, and bring them back safely to a sea landing. It uses a human-rated version of the LVM3 launch vehicle, a crew module for the astronauts and a service module for propulsion and power, and is preceded by uncrewed flights and test-vehicle missions. The first test-vehicle flight, TV-D1, in October 2023, tested the crew escape system that pulls the capsule away from a failing rocket. The programme is led by ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre in Bengaluru, with DRDO laboratories supplying life-support, recovery and safety systems. 2. **Re-entry is mainly a problem of drag and heat —** A capsule returning from orbit travels at several kilometres per second, and most of that speed is shed through atmospheric drag, which converts kinetic energy into heat absorbed by a heat shield. A blunt body shape increases drag and pushes the shock wave away from the surface, reducing heating, which is why crew capsules are blunt rather than streamlined.

	Parachutes operate only in the last phase, once the vehicle is subsonic. The dynamic pressure on a parachute depends on air density and the square of velocity, so opening a large chute too early creates forces that can destroy it. 3. **Redundancy is the principle of crewed-system design —** Human-rated systems are designed so that no single failure can cause loss of the crew, a principle often called single-fault tolerance. In recovery systems this means clusters of parachutes, each with an independent deployment chain, so that the loss of one still allows a safe descent. The same principle governs the crew escape system and life support. It is why crewed programmes spend years on tests that uncrewed satellite missions do not need. 4. **DRDO laboratories are part of India's space ecosystem —** The Defence Research and Development Organisation, formed in 1958 and working under the Department of Defence Research and Development of the Ministry of Defence, runs a network of laboratories. The Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment at Agra develops parachute and aerial delivery systems, and the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory at Chandigarh operates test facilities including a rail track rocket sled. Cooperation between ISRO, a civilian agency under the Department of Space, and DRDO shows how dual-use technologies are shared across India's strategic establishment.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Space technology is a GS3 fixture —** The GS3 syllabus names awareness in the fields of space and indigenisation of technology. Mains has asked about India's space programme and its benefits, and Prelims regularly tests missions, launch vehicles and the organisations behind them. Gaganyaan components, test flights and the agencies involved are frequent targets. 2. **Explainers like this are where Prelims statements come from —** The examiner likes mechanism-based statements: the order of parachute deployment, the purpose of reefing, why deployment is subsonic, and which laboratory develops what. Learning the mechanism once protects against several tricky statement combinations.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Gaganyaan crew module parachute system uses pilot, drogue and main parachutes, with drogues deployed early to stabilise and slow the module. • The Gaganyaan crew module has two drogue parachutes deployed by mortars and three main parachutes deployed by mortar-ejected pilot chutes. • The Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment at Agra, a DRDO laboratory, is the developing agency for the Gaganyaan parachute system. • A rail track rocket sled facility for parachute testing is located at the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory, Chandigarh. • Reefing is a technique in which a cord around a parachute canopy restricts its opening until a timed cutter releases it. • ISRO conducted the first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) for Gaganyaan at Sriharikota in August 2025 using an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter. • Crew-module parachutes are generally deployed only after the capsule has slowed below the speed of sound, because dynamic pressure on the canopy rises with the square of velocity.
ANALYSIS	1. **The parachute is where a crewed programme is most unforgiving —** A launch failure can be survived through the escape system, but a recovery failure at the end of a successful mission has no backup other than the remaining chutes. That is why the design tolerates the loss of one of three main chutes and why so much testing — sleds, air drops, rocket-powered test vehicles — goes into a system that works only for a few minutes. The time the programme is taking should be read in this light. Delay in

	crewed spaceflight is often a sign of caution rather than incompetence. 2. **Indigenous recovery systems are a strategic asset, not just a technical milestone —** Few countries have developed crew-rated parachute systems, and those that have do not sell them freely. By having a DRDO laboratory build the system and a DRDO facility test it, India acquires knowledge that also serves military airdrop, payload recovery and future reusable systems. The counter-view is that buying proven components could save time. But a crewed programme that depends on imported safety-critical systems is exposed to export controls at exactly the moment it matters. 3. **Materials science is the hidden bottleneck —** Kevlar, Nomex and aerospace nylon are specialised polymers, and the explainer notes that parachute performance depends on tensile strength, heat resistance and mass. Whether India produces these materials domestically at aerospace grade is a question the article does not answer, and it matters for self-reliance. A programme can be indigenous in design and still import its fibres. Building domestic capacity in advanced materials is one of the less visible tasks of Atmanirbhar Bharat in space. 4. **Testing infrastructure outlives the mission —** Facilities such as the rocket sled at Chandigarh and the integrated air-drop test capability are assets that future missions — a space station module, cargo return capsules, planetary landers — will reuse. Public spending on test infrastructure is therefore an investment in a pipeline, not a one-off cost. The private space sector opened up since 2020 will also need such facilities, and access to them on fair terms can help Indian start-ups.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In human spaceflight, the most critical systems are the ones that operate for only a few minutes." Discuss with reference to the recovery system of the Gaganyaan crew module, and examine how indigenous development of such systems contributes to India's strategic autonomy in space. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Introduce Gaganyaan as India's crewed mission to low earth orbit and state that a safe return depends on a staged parachute system after atmospheric drag has removed most of the capsule's speed. 2. **Body — how the system works —** Explain pilot, drogue and main chutes, deployment through the wake below the speed of sound, staging and reefing to limit opening shock at about 170 m/s, the two-drogue and three-main configuration, and redundancy against a single main-chute failure. 3. **Body — testing and development —** Describe the RTRS at TBRL Chandigarh, helicopter and aircraft drops including IADT-01 in August 2025, rocket-powered test vehicles, and ADRDE Agra's role; mention materials such as Kevlar, Nomex and nylon. 4. **Body — strategic autonomy —** Argue that indigenous safety-critical systems reduce exposure to export controls, create dual-use capabilities for defence airdrop and future reusable systems, and build test infrastructure for a space station and private space firms; note the remaining dependence on advanced materials. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that crew safety is the measure of a spacefaring nation and that patient, indigenous testing is the price of independence in human spaceflight.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As a mission director, you are under pressure to announce a crewed launch date, but one parachute test has shown an anomaly. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** Crew safety must override schedule pressure, so I would not announce a date until the anomaly is understood and a corrective test succeeds. I would convene a failure analysis board, share its findings with the programme's review committees and communicate honestly to the public that testing is continuing. The history of human spaceflight shows that disasters often follow when warnings are overridden to meet a

date. A short delay costs prestige; a failure costs lives and the programme.

Q2. A private start-up asks to use the DRDO rocket sled facility for its own payload recovery system. How should the government respond?

Approach: Opening public test facilities to private firms on transparent terms supports the space sector reforms and avoids costly duplication. Access should be granted through a published fee structure and scheduling system, with priority for national missions and appropriate security safeguards for a defence facility. IN-SPACe, the authorisation body for private space activities, can act as the interface. This turns a sunk public investment into a platform for the wider ecosystem.

Q3. An interview board asks: is human spaceflight worth the cost for a developing country?

Approach: Human spaceflight drives technologies in life support, materials, medicine and safety engineering that have wide uses, and it builds institutional capability that satellites alone do not. It also gives a country a seat when norms for space stations and lunar activity are being written. The cost must be weighed against other priorities, but India's programme is modest by global standards and builds on existing launch capacity. The strongest case is that the capacity to go and return safely is a form of sovereignty that cannot be bought later.

7.2 Experts Urge India to Secure Early Access to Frontier AI Models for Safety Testing

THE NEWS New Delhi. Policy experts urge India to create a formal mechanism giving government agencies, technical institutions and independent researchers early access to frontier artificial intelligence models — the most capable models being built by leading laboratories — in controlled environments for safety and red-team testing, ET's Tanya Pandey reports. Red-teaming means deliberately attacking a system to find its weaknesses before real adversaries do. Findings could be shared confidentially with developers so that vulnerabilities are fixed before wide deployment. India, the paper notes, has limited homegrown frontier capability and no formal system for early access to overseas models. "If India is consistently brought into the conversation only after the first round of frontier-model testing, we risk becoming a rule-taker rather than a rule-shaper," said Kazim Rizvi, founder of the policy think tank The Dialogue, who pointed to India's "highly diverse language landscape, rapidly digitising public services and distinctive cybersecurity risks"; a model that behaves safely in English under Western testing could behave differently in Indian languages or when connected to financial, identity and public digital systems. He suggested a trusted evaluation programme under strict confidentiality safeguards. Nikhil Narendran, partner at Trilegal, said "the bigger issue is lack of access, not just coming in late", warning that other states or state-sponsored actors could exploit the window. Apeksha Kaushik, senior principal analyst at Gartner, cautioned that limited visibility of Indian testers "does not by itself demonstrate that India has been excluded", as such testing is often confidential, but urged formal pathways into red-team programmes and cyber ranges. The same ET package reports that Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei has called for slowing frontier AI development until safeguards catch up, a study by the firm Emergence AI found that AI agents could team up to get around safety restrictions in eight simulations on frontier models, and that Google's Gemini, in an incident disclosed last week, hacked three companies in May by finding public information and guessing credentials. Mr. Rizvi warned that India "cannot afford to interpret calls for caution as a reason to step back" from frontier AI, since an uneven slowdown could lock in the advantage of countries that already have models, compute and capital. An Indian Express editorial notes that in the Emergence AI experiment agents developed their own increasingly impenetrable "languages". The syllabus link is emerging technology, cybersecurity and India's role in global technology governance.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Frontier AI models are built by a few overseas laboratories and tested first in closed, confidential rounds → the first round shapes which risks are prioritised and which safeguards become industry standards → India, with limited homegrown frontier capability, has no formal route into that round → AI agents begin acting autonomously, including reported hacking and coordinated evasion of safety limits → experts call for an Indian trusted-evaluation mechanism tested against Indian languages and digital public infrastructure

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	1. **The IndiaAI Mission is the State's main AI programme —** The Union Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission in March 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,372 crore, implemented through the IndiaAI Independent Business Division under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Its pillars include compute capacity, foundation models, datasets, application development, skilling, start-up financing and "safe and trusted AI". According to a PIB release of January 2025, the government announced an IndiaAI Safety Institute working on a hub-and-spoke model with research and academic institutions and private partners, focused on research grounded in Indian datasets and India's linguistic and social diversity. 2. **AI safety institutes emerged from the summit process —** The first global AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in the United Kingdom in November 2023 produced the Bletchley Declaration, which India signed, recognising risks from frontier AI. The UK and the US then set up government AI safety institutes to evaluate models before release, and an international network of such institutes followed. Subsequent summits were held in Seoul in 2024 and Paris in 2025, and India hosted an AI Impact Summit in New Delhi in 2026. Pre-deployment testing by these bodies usually depends on voluntary agreements with companies. 3. **India's cyber law already recognises critical systems —** The Information Technology Act, 2000 provides for the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team under Section 70B as the national agency for cyber incident response, and for the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre under Section 70A to protect systems whose failure would affect national security, the economy or public health. Section 70 allows the government to declare a computer resource a protected system. AI models connected to banking, identity or power systems would fall within the concerns these provisions address. 4. **Red-teaming and responsible disclosure are established security practices —** Red-teaming, borrowed from military exercises, is the practice of a dedicated team attacking a system to expose weaknesses. Responsible or coordinated disclosure means informing a developer of a vulnerability privately and allowing time to fix it before public release. Cyber ranges are controlled environments where attacks can be simulated safely. These practices are standard in software security and are now being extended to AI models, where the "vulnerability" can be harmful behaviour as well as a technical flaw.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **AI questions have moved from "uses" to "governance" —** Earlier questions asked how AI could help in health or agriculture; recent Mains questions ask about ethical and regulatory challenges. GS3 includes science and technology developments and security challenges in cyberspace, and GS2 includes India's role in international institutions. A question on AI testing and standard-setting bridges both. 2. **Rule-taker versus rule-shaper is a recurring framing —** The same idea appears in debates on trade rules, climate finance and data governance. Candidates who can show how early participation shapes standards — and how late entry creates dependence — can reuse the argument across papers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The IndiaAI Mission was approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,372 crore. • The IndiaAI Safety Institute, announced in January 2025, follows a hub-and-spoke model with academic, research and industry partners. • The Bletchley Declaration on AI safety was adopted at the AI Safety Summit held in the United Kingdom in November 2023, and India is a signatory. • CERT-In is the national nodal agency for cyber incident response under Section

	70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000. ● The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre is designated under Section 70A of the Information Technology Act, 2000. ● Red-teaming refers to deliberately attacking a system to find weaknesses before it is deployed.
ANALYSIS	1. **Access, not capability, is the immediate bargaining problem —** India cannot demand early access as of right; frontier laboratories grant it through voluntary agreements, usually to governments with regulatory leverage or strong technical institutions. India's leverage is its market — hundreds of millions of users, a huge developer base and public digital infrastructure that companies want to integrate with. A formal evaluation regime that makes deployment in sensitive sectors conditional on Indian testing would convert that market into bargaining power. The risk is that heavy conditions push companies to delay Indian launches, so the regime must be predictable and fast. 2. **Indian-context testing is a genuine gap, not national pride —** Safety evaluations run largely in English cannot show how a model behaves when asked in Bhojpuri about medicines or in Tamil about a bank transfer, and models are known to be less well aligned in lower-resource languages. When such models are plugged into UPI, Aadhaar-linked services or government helplines, failures would occur in exactly the settings Western testing does not cover. This is a technical argument for Indian testers, and it is stronger than the sovereignty argument. It also gives companies a reason to cooperate, because Indian testing improves their products. 3. **The Gartner caution deserves weight —** Ms. Kaushik's point that confidential testing may already include Indian participants is a useful correction to a narrative of exclusion. The policy conclusion, however, survives: informal participation does not give the Indian State findings it can act on. A formal mechanism creates institutional memory, clear confidentiality rules and a channel for regulators to receive classified assessments. The difference is between individual researchers being invited and the country having a seat. 4. **Agentic AI changes the threat from words to actions —** The reported Gemini incident and the Emergence AI study mark a shift that makes testing more urgent: a chatbot that says something harmful is a content problem, but an agent that logs into systems and acts is a security problem. India's critical information infrastructure — power grids, payments, telecom — is exactly where agentic misuse would cause the most harm. Testing must therefore include agents operating in simulated Indian systems, not only question-and-answer evaluations. The IE editorial's observation that agents develop languages humans cannot follow adds a monitoring challenge that current law does not address. 5. **A global slowdown could be unequal, and India should say so —** Mr. Rizvi's warning against reading calls for caution as a reason to step back is the most strategic point in the story. If the leading laboratories slow down after building their models and compute, and others are asked to follow, the gap between them and late entrants freezes. India's position can be that safety rules should apply to capability thresholds, not to who got there first, and that safety cooperation must include capacity-building. The counter-view is that safety risks are real regardless of equity. Both can be true, which is why India's argument should be for shared testing, not against caution.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Coming late to the testing of frontier artificial intelligence may turn India into a rule-taker rather than a rule-shaper." Examine the case for an Indian mechanism for early, independent safety testing of frontier AI models, and discuss the challenges in establishing it. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define frontier AI and red-teaming, and state the demand for a formal mechanism giving Indian agencies, institutions and researchers early, confidential access to models for safety and security testing. 2. **Body — why it matters —** Cover India-specific risks — linguistic diversity, integration with public digital infrastructure and financial systems, critical infrastructure and cyber threats — and the rule-shaping power of the first round of testing; cite the rise of autonomous agents and reported incidents. 3. **Body — institutional basis —** Link to the IndiaAI Mission and its safe and trusted AI pillar, the IndiaAI Safety Institute's hub-and-spoke model, CERT-In and NCIIPC under the IT Act, and the international network of AI safety institutes since the Bletchley Declaration. 4. **Body — challenges —** Discuss limited leverage over foreign firms, confidentiality and intellectual property, technical talent and compute for testing, conflict of interest, risk of delaying launches, and the argument that exclusion is not proven; propose conditions linked to deployment in sensitive sectors and reciprocal agreements. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that India should combine domestic model development with an institutional testing capability, so that it both builds and checks the systems its citizens will rely on.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Secretary, MeitY, a foreign AI company offers your testers access to its new model only if all findings remain confidential indefinitely. Do you accept?** ***Approach:*** I would accept confidentiality for a defined period to allow fixes, as is standard in responsible disclosure, but not indefinitely. Regulators must be able to act on serious findings, and the public must eventually know if a widely used system had a dangerous flaw. I would negotiate a disclosure timeline, a right to share classified assessments with sectoral regulators and clear conflict-of-interest rules for testers. An agreement that silences the tester permanently does not serve safety. **Q2. A State government wants to deploy an AI agent to process welfare applications. What safeguards would you insist on?** ***Approach:*** I would require that the agent may recommend but not finally approve or reject applications without human review, especially for rejections. The system should be tested in the languages applicants actually use, with audit logs of every decision and a grievance mechanism for citizens. Data access should be limited to what is necessary, consistent with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. A pilot with independent evaluation should precede statewide deployment. **Q3. An interview board asks: should India support a global pause on frontier AI development?** ***Approach:*** India should support strong safety standards but be wary of a pause that freezes the current distribution of capability. The better position is that rules should be based on risk and capability thresholds and apply to all developers, with shared testing and capacity-building for countries still building their own models. India has both a stake in safety, given its vast user base, and a stake in not being locked out. Its diplomacy should hold both interests together.

7.3 Microsoft Opens Fourth Indian Cloud Region as Data-Centre Capacity Must Grow Five- to Seven-Fold

THE NEWS New Delhi / Hyderabad. Microsoft on Monday announced the launch of its fourth cloud region in India — India South Central, in Hyderabad — which it is positioning as a strategic hub for Asia and the Global South, The Economic Times reports. Its other Indian cloud regions are in Pune, Chennai and Mumbai. A cloud or data-centre region is a location where a company builds a cluster of data facilities that store and process customers' data and run software, including artificial intelligence models. Puneet Chandok, Microsoft's president for India and South Asia, told ET on the sidelines of the launch event that the company is constantly scouting for new regions as demand for cloud and AI infrastructure rises, because "these regions take a lot of time to build". He said India currently has about 2 GW of data-centre capacity but will need 10-14 GW in the coming years. Microsoft has committed $20.5 billion towards cloud and AI infrastructure in India, comprising $17.5 billion announced in December 2025 on top of an earlier $3 billion commitment. Globally, the company is expanding its data-centre capacity from around 12 GW to more than 38 GW by 2032; Mr. Chandok did not disclose India's share but said the country would remain a "meaningful part" of it. He said building AI infrastructure would need hyperscalers — the very large cloud providers — as well as private capital, government support and smaller cloud providers, and that customers increasingly want infrastructure that gives them greater control over their data. "We do not train our foundation models on commercial customer data," he said, adding that AI "and agents that we're building always need to be in human control". Jitin Prasada, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and for Electronics and Information Technology, said at the same event that there is "no compromise when it comes to the environmental impact or excessive use of water by data centres", and that the government is working on ease of doing business and land availability as capacity expands. The same day, ET reported a Wall Street Journal analysis that major technology companies hold $3.1 trillion in off-balance-sheet commitments, with Microsoft's uncommenced leases, primarily for data centres, at $329.1 billion. The syllabus link is infrastructure, investment models and digital sovereignty: data centres combine land, electricity, water and capital into the physical base of the digital economy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Digitisation of payments, government services and business creates rising demand for local computing → AI multiplies that demand and makes compute a strategic resource → India's data-centre capacity stands at about 2 GW against an estimated need of 10-14 GW → global hyperscalers commit large capital, with Microsoft pledging $20.5 billion and opening a fourth region in Hyderabad → the State must now supply land, reliable power and water while protecting data and the environment

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **Data centres are now recognised as infrastructure —** In October 2022 the Union Finance Ministry added data centres to the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors, which makes such projects eligible for easier and longer-term infrastructure lending. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology released a draft Data Centre Policy in 2020 to promote India as a data-centre hub, and several States, including Telangana, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, have their own data-centre policies offering land, power and tax incentives. For government workloads, MeitY empanels cloud service providers under the MeghRaj or GI Cloud initiative, launched in 2014.

2. **Where data sits is governed by several laws —** The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 allows transfer of personal data outside India except to countries that the Central Government restricts by notification, a "negative list" approach, and establishes the Data Protection Board of India for enforcement. Sectoral rules can be stricter: the Reserve Bank of India's directive of April 2018 requires payment system data to be stored only in India. Such localisation rules are one reason global cloud firms build regions inside India, because regulated customers such as banks and government departments need data to stay within the country.

3. **Compute is a pillar of India's AI strategy —** The IndiaAI Mission, approved in March 2024 with an outlay of about ₹10,372 crore, includes a compute pillar under which the government subsidises access to graphics processing units for researchers and start-ups through private providers. Large language models require clusters of such processors, which consume large amounts of electricity and need cooling, often using water. This links digital policy to energy and water policy, making data centres a cross-sectoral concern.

4. **Power and water are the physical limits of the digital economy —** A data centre's capacity is measured in megawatts or gigawatts of electrical load, not in floor area, because power is the binding constraint. Cooling can use evaporative systems that

	consume water, and efficiency is often expressed as Power Usage Effectiveness, the ratio of total facility energy to the energy used by computing equipment. India's target of 500 GW of non-fossil electricity capacity by 2030 and its water stress in many cities mean that data-centre growth must be planned with the grid and water resources in mind.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Infrastructure and investment models are core GS3 —** The GS3 syllabus covers infrastructure, investment models and the effects of liberalisation on the economy. UPSC has asked about data localisation, the digital economy and cloud computing in earlier papers. Data centres are the meeting point of these topics and are increasingly discussed in Economic Surveys. 2. **Digital sovereignty is an emerging essay and GS2 theme —** Questions on data protection, data localisation and the power of big technology firms have appeared in both GS2 and essays. The Microsoft story adds the physical dimension: sovereignty depends not only on laws about data but on who owns the buildings, the chips and the power supply.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Data centres were included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors in October 2022. ● The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 permits cross-border transfer of personal data except to countries restricted by notification of the Central Government. ● The Data Protection Board of India is established under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. ● The RBI's April 2018 directive requires payment system operators to store payment data only in India. ● MeghRaj, launched in 2014, is the Government of India's cloud computing initiative for government departments. ● Power Usage Effectiveness is the ratio of the total energy used by a data centre to the energy used by its IT equipment.
ANALYSIS	1. **The gap between 2 GW and 14 GW is really a power-sector problem —** Going from about 2 GW to 10-14 GW of data-centre load means adding demand equivalent to several large power stations, concentrated in a few cities and required round the clock. Firms want this power to be green to meet their climate commitments, which requires either dedicated renewable capacity with storage or open-access procurement through State grids. The binding constraint is therefore the capacity of State distribution companies and transmission networks, not the willingness of hyperscalers to invest. Data-centre policy that ignores the grid will produce announcements rather than capacity. 2. **Foreign capital builds the base, but dependence has a price —** Microsoft's $20.5 billion commitment brings capital India does not have to spare, and in the language of factors of production it adds physical capital and uses land and energy productively. But when the largest facilities are owned by a handful of foreign firms, pricing power, access to advanced chips and decisions about where AI capacity is placed rest outside India. The counter-view is that ownership matters less than jurisdiction, because data centres located in India are subject to Indian law. The balanced policy is to welcome hyperscalers while supporting Indian providers and public compute so that the market does not become a closed oligopoly. 3. **The Minister's water promise needs a mechanism —** Saying there will be "no compromise" on water use is easy; enforcing it requires water-use disclosure,

	efficiency standards and siting rules that keep water-intensive cooling out of stressed basins. Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru have all faced water shortages in recent years. A data-centre policy could require reporting of water use per unit of computing, favour air or closed-loop cooling in water-stressed cities and link approvals to local water budgets. Without such rules, the promise will not bind anyone. 4. **Off-balance-sheet commitments signal a financial risk worth watching —** The $3.1 trillion in off-balance-sheet commitments reported by the Wall Street Journal shows that the AI build-out is being financed partly through long leases and future obligations rather than current cash. If demand for AI services grows more slowly than expected, some projects could be delayed or abandoned, leaving land and power contracts stranded. For India, this argues for sequencing public support — land allotment, grid connection — to actual construction milestones rather than announcements. Enthusiasm for investment should not blind policymakers to the cycle. 5. **Customer control of data is becoming a competitive promise —** Mr. Chandok's assurance that Microsoft does not train foundation models on commercial customer data shows that trust has become a selling point. For Indian regulators, this is an opportunity to turn voluntary promises into enforceable standards through contracts for government cloud services and rules under the data protection law. Businesses and government departments need assurance not only about where data is stored but about what it is used for. The shift from localisation to use-limitation is the next stage of data governance.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Data centres have been called the physical foundation of the digital economy. Examine the opportunities and challenges for India in expanding its data-centre capacity, with particular reference to energy, water, investment and data sovereignty. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Define a data centre and cloud region, and cite the scale of the task: about 2 GW of capacity today against an estimated need of 10-14 GW, with Microsoft opening its fourth Indian region in Hyderabad and committing $20.5 billion. 2. **Body — opportunities —** Cover digital public infrastructure and AI demand, investment and jobs, infrastructure status since October 2022, State data-centre policies, localisation requirements that favour domestic hosting, and India's potential as a hub for the Global South. 3. **Body — challenges —** Discuss electricity demand and the need for green power, water use in stressed cities, land availability, dependence on foreign hyperscalers and chips, financial risks visible in large off-balance-sheet commitments, and data protection concerns. 4. **Body — the way forward —** Suggest a national data-centre policy linked to grid and renewable planning, water-use disclosure and efficiency standards, support for Indian cloud providers and public compute under the IndiaAI Mission, and enforceable data-use standards under the DPDP Act, 2023. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that digital sovereignty rests on physical capacity as much as on law, and that data centres must be planned as energy and water infrastructure, not only as IT investments.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As Industries Secretary of a State, you are asked to allot 100 acres and a dedicated power line to a hyperscaler's data centre. What do you examine?** ***Approach:*** I would examine the power requirement and whether the State grid and discom can supply it reliably, preferably from renewable sources, without affecting other consumers. I would assess water availability for cooling and require an efficient

cooling design, check that the land allotment is fair and transparent, and link incentives to construction milestones and employment. I would also ensure compliance with State data-centre policy and environmental clearances. A clear, time-bound single-window process serves both the State and the investor.

Q2. Residents near a proposed data centre complain that it will draw on scarce groundwater. How would you respond as District Collector?

Approach: I would ask for the project's water-use estimates and cooling design and have the groundwater authority assess the impact on local aquifers. If the risk is real, I would require the use of treated wastewater or air-cooled systems and set a cap on groundwater extraction. I would hold a public consultation so that residents' concerns are recorded and addressed. Investment is welcome, but not at the cost of drinking water for the local population.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India require that all Indian data be stored in data centres owned by Indian companies?

Approach: Ownership-based localisation would deter investment India needs and could raise costs for Indian businesses. What matters is that data stored in India is subject to Indian law, that sensitive government and financial data meets strict security standards, and that use of data is limited to agreed purposes. India should also build domestic capacity through Indian providers and public compute so that it is not dependent on a few firms. Jurisdiction and competition, not ownership mandates, are the better tools.

8. Society

Today's society stories are about power that works through ordinary people rather than through the state. Parents acting as customers push private schools toward majoritarian rules. On elite campuses, a student from a disadvantaged caste meets faculty and a campus culture that make one in three students feel like an outsider. On a Bihar roadside, a group of men decide that two teenagers have broken a social rule and punish them for it. In each case the law exists, but the social pressure moves faster than the law does, and institutions give way to it unless they are designed to resist.

8.1 EPW Study Finds Parents Acting as 'Hindu Customers' Push Majoritarian Rules Into Delhi's Private Schools

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Hindu's Text & Context page summarises a paper by Ritika Arora-Kukreja, "Hindutva by Other Means: The Educational Market and the Politics of Demand", published in the Economic and Political Weekly (Vol. 61, Issue No. 34, August 22, 2026). The summary, by Rebecca Rose Varghese, explains the argument that Hindutva, the political ideology of Hindu nationalism, is spreading through everyday interactions in the education market, not only through government policy or Hindutva organisations. Existing research on "saffronisation" has focused on the state's use of curriculum and regulation, including under BJP-led governments in 1998-2004 and from 2014. The author calls the other channel "bottom-up Hindutva": preferences in society shape institutions, instead of institutions shaping society. The study is based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with households with children, and interviews with school leaders, across private schools in Delhi-NCR between April and September 2022. After the 1991 liberalisation, middle and upper-middle class families moved to private schools, where direct state control is limited; in Delhi, private-school enrolment at the primary and middle levels rose from around 30% in 2014-15 to over 46% in 2019-20. Parental preference took the place of the state apparatus. For instance, a school may not appoint a Muslim teacher if parents fear the teacher will promote Islam, or may ban non-vegetarian lunches if most parents are vegetarian. Strong competition between schools, combined with a majority population, creates what the author calls the "Hindu customer", whose demands must be met: highlighting Hindu festivals, giving holidays for them, not admitting students of certain groups, and trying to ban the hijab. She calls this "hyper-accountability", since schools satisfy the majority and ignore minority families, whose dissatisfaction has less economic impact. Schools use neutral reasons, such as hygiene to ban non-vegetarian food and security to ban the hijab, while not applying the same standards to other groups' symbols. The author calls this the "depoliticisation of choices": political preferences, formed through news media, social media and neighbourhoods, are presented as private consumer choices. The market does not create these preferences, but it provides a space where they are expressed as legitimate demands. The syllabus link is secularism, communalism, and education as an agent of socialisation.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

1991 liberalisation opens schooling to private providers → urban middle classes shift to private schools, where state control is thin → schools compete for fee-paying parents → political preferences formed by media and neighbourhood enter as consumer demands → schools accommodate the majority, citing neutral reasons, and sideline minority families

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE	
	1. **Minority and religious rights in education are written into the Constitution** — Article 28(1) bars religious instruction in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds, and Article 28(3) says no person attending a State-recognised or State-aided institution can be required to take part in religious instruction or worship without consent. Article 29(2) forbids denial of admission to any State-maintained or State-aided institution on grounds only of religion, race, caste or language. Article 30(1) gives religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination by the State on grounds of religion, and Article 15(2) extends this to access to shops and public places. 2. **Secularism is part of the basic structure, and Fundamental Duties speak of harmony** — The word "secular" was added to the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment, 1976, and in S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994), a nine-judge Bench held secularism to be part of the basic structure. Article 51A(e) makes it a fundamental duty to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic and regional diversities, and Article 51A(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite

	culture. In Aruna Roy v. Union of India (2002), the Supreme Court held that teaching about religions as part of value education does not violate secularism. 3. **The RTE Act regulates private schools but not their everyday culture —** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 gives effect to Article 21A, inserted by the 86th Amendment, 2002, for children aged six to fourteen. Section 12(1)(c) requires private unaided schools to reserve at least 25% of entry-level seats for children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups. Section 29 requires the curriculum to conform to the values enshrined in the Constitution. The Act says little about staff appointments, food rules or dress codes, which is exactly the space the EPW paper examines. 4. **Sociology sees schools as places where society reproduces itself —** Emile Durkheim treated education as the means by which society passes on its shared values to the next generation. Louis Althusser called schools an "ideological state apparatus" through which dominant ideas are reproduced, and Pierre Bourdieu showed how schools reward the cultural capital of dominant classes. The EPW paper adds that in a market system, it is not only the state but the paying customer who decides what is reproduced. In the hijab dispute, the Karnataka High Court upheld the State's order in March 2022, and in October 2022 a two-judge Supreme Court Bench delivered a split verdict and referred the matter to a larger Bench.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS1 lists communalism, secularism and the effects of globalisation on Indian society —** UPSC has asked about the challenges to secularism, the role of education in social change and the effects of globalisation on culture. This paper connects all three: market reform changes schooling, and schooling carries communal preferences. 2. **Sociology optional values named concepts and fieldwork —** Concepts such as "bottom-up Hindutva", "hyper-accountability" and "depoliticisation of choices", backed by fieldwork, are the material a Sociology answer can use to show engagement with current research rather than textbook definitions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article 28(1) provides that no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds. • Article 29(2) prohibits denial of admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving State aid on grounds only of religion, race, caste or language. • Article 30(1) gives all minorities, whether based on religion or language, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. • The word "secular" was added to the Preamble by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976. • Section 12(1)(c) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 requires private unaided schools to reserve at least 25% of entry-level seats for children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups. • Article 51A(f) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to value and preserve the rich heritage of the country's composite culture. • Article 21A, inserted by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged six to fourteen.
ANALYSIS	1. **The market is not neutral when one group holds most of the purchasing power —** The standard argument for school choice is that parental power makes schools accountable. The paper shows that accountability goes to whoever holds the most fees, and in a majority neighbourhood that is the majority. A minority family can leave,

	but if every competing school follows the same logic, exit gives no real choice. This is a textbook case of how markets aggregate preferences, including prejudiced ones, without correcting them. 2. **Neutral reasons are the mechanism of exclusion, and that is why it is hard to challenge —** A school that bans the hijab "for security" or non-vegetarian food "for hygiene" presents a rule that looks general. The paper's point is that the rule is applied selectively, which only the minority family notices. Courts and regulators test rules on their face, so discrimination through neutral reasons often escapes legal scrutiny. The remedy lies in asking for evidence that the stated reason applies equally to all, the same standard of proof the Supreme Court used in the methanol case. 3. **The counter-view: parents have a right to shape their children's schooling —** Parents choosing vegetarian food or festival celebrations are exercising ordinary preferences, and not every such choice is ideological. Private schools must respond to their community to survive. The paper's concern is not choice itself but choices that exclude others, such as refusing to appoint a Muslim teacher or admit certain students, which touch Articles 15 and 29 and basic fairness in employment. The line is between a school that adds a festival and one that removes a group. 4. **Bottom-up ideology is more durable than state-led ideology —** A curriculum can be revised by the next government, but preferences that parents hold and schools accommodate do not change with elections. Once schools normalise excluding minority teachers or symbols, children grow up treating that as ordinary. This means that countering communalism requires work within society, in parent-teacher bodies, school codes and teacher training, not only changes in textbooks. The finding complicates the common belief that the state alone drives saffronisation. 5. **Limits of the study should be stated —** The fieldwork covers private schools in Delhi-NCR in 2022, a single urban region at a particular political moment. The findings may not hold in States with different majorities or in government schools, where state control is stronger. Qualitative interviews also reveal mechanisms rather than prevalence. A careful answer uses the paper to explain how bias travels through markets, without claiming it describes all Indian schools.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Marketisation of education can turn majoritarian preferences into consumer demands." Examine this statement in the context of private schooling in India. What institutional safeguards can protect the secular character of schools? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Introduce the EPW paper by Ritika Arora-Kukreja and its idea of "bottom-up Hindutva", based on fieldwork in Delhi-NCR private schools in 2022, with the rise of private enrolment in Delhi from about 30% to over 46% between 2014-15 and 2019-20. 2. **Body — how the mechanism works —** Explain the "Hindu customer", "hyper-accountability" and "depoliticisation of choices", with the paper's examples: festivals, food rules, hijab bans and reluctance to appoint Muslim teachers, justified in neutral terms. 3. **Body — constitutional framework —** Cite Articles 15, 28, 29 and 30, Article 51A(e) and (f), S.R. Bommai on secularism and the RTE Act's Section 29 requirement that curriculum conform to constitutional values. 4. **Body — balance and safeguards —** Concede that parental involvement is legitimate. Suggest school codes on non-discrimination in hiring and admission, grievance mechanisms for minority parents, inclusion of diversity in school recognition norms, teacher training in constitutional values, and data on hiring by religion in private schools.

	5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that secularism in schools depends on everyday institutional choices as much as on textbooks, and that schools must be accountable to the Constitution as well as to their customers.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. As District Education Officer, you receive a complaint that a private school has refused to appoint a teacher because of her religion. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would inquire into the complaint by asking the school for its selection records and the reasons for rejection, and hear the candidate. If religion was the reason, I would issue a notice citing the conditions of recognition and constitutional values, and advise the candidate of legal remedies. I would also issue a general advisory to all schools on non-discrimination in hiring. The aim is to correct the practice, not only to punish one school. **Q2. An interview board asks: should the state interfere in the food rules of private schools?** ***Approach:*** The state should not dictate menus, but it can require that rules apply equally and do not single out any community. A school may promote healthy food for all, but a rule that bans one community's food on a stated hygiene ground without applying the same check to others is discriminatory. The test is whether the rule serves the stated purpose for everyone. Regulation should target exclusion, not ordinary choices. **Q3. As a school principal, a group of parents demands that you ban a religious symbol worn by some students. How would you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would listen to the parents, but explain that the school follows the law and treats all students equally, and that a rule for one community must apply to all. If there is a genuine safety or uniform concern, I would frame a general rule after consultation with all parents, including minority families. I would not take a decision under pressure that excludes some children from class. A school teaches fairness mainly by practising it.

8.2 Supreme Court's Task Force Links Campus Suicides to Competition, Caste and Faculty Mismatch

THE NEWS New Delhi / Mumbai. The Economic Times reports on the 211-page interim report of the National Task Force (NTF) on 'Mental Health of Students and Prevention of Suicides in Higher Educational Institutes'. The Supreme Court set up the NTF in March 2025 while hearing a case about two student suicides at IIT Delhi in 2023 in which the police had refused to register an FIR. Per Supreme Court Observer's report on the case, Amit Kumar v. Union of India, the NTF is chaired by former Supreme Court judge S. Ravindra Bhat and was constituted by a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan. Its final report is due by November. Citing parliamentary replies, the NTF found that over 13,600 students from disadvantaged communities dropped out of premier institutions between 2018 and 2023: 4,596 OBC, 2,424 SC and 2,622 ST students from central universities; 2,066 OBC, 1,068 SC and 408 ST students from IITs; and 163 OBC, 188 SC and 91 ST students from IIMs, despite fee waivers and stipends. About 60% of students now come from SC, ST or OBC communities, while 56% of faculty in higher education belong to socially advantaged groups. In Institutes of National Importance such as the IITs and NITs, only 7.57% of faculty are SC and 1.91% ST, while 67.71% are from "privileged" backgrounds. This "social mismatch" may cause "low academic integration", which is associated with depression, dropout and suicide, the report said. IIT faculty spoke of a "relentless culture of academic competition", and some linked it to "reservation politics". The report describes a "vibe check", a campus culture not explicitly casteist that students from disadvantaged groups mostly fail, leading to isolation. In NTF surveys, 34% of students felt like an "outsider" on campus, 15% recalled a period of being "very distressed" in the previous six months, and 9% reported "suicidal thoughts" often. The report notes the absence of "systematic screening mechanisms". On Monday, IIT Bombay removed Professor Suryanarayana Doolla, named in an FIR over the death of B.Tech student Sahil Wakode, from the post of Dean (Administrative Affairs); The Hindu gives Wakode's age as 20, ET as 22. In The Indian Express, Jaison Manjaly, former dean of student affairs at IIT Gandhinagar, argues that universities must "rethink the campus, not just the student". The syllabus link is caste, education and mental health.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Reservation widens access so that about 60% of students are SC, ST or OBC → faculty and campus culture remain dominated by socially advantaged groups → competition, grade pressure and a "vibe check" isolate students, with 34% feeling like outsiders → over 13,600 disadvantaged students drop out of premier institutions in 2018-23 and suicides recur → Supreme Court's NTF interim report names institutional causes as new deaths at IIT Bombay spark protests

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<tr><td>STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE</td><td>
1. The Constitution allows special provisions in education for backward classes — Article 15(4), added by the First Amendment, 1951, allows special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes and for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Article 15(5), added by the 93rd Amendment, 2005, allows such provisions for admission to educational institutions, including private ones, other than minority institutions. The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 gives 15% to SC, 7.5% to ST and 27% to OBC students in central institutions. Article 46, a Directive Principle, directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, especially SCs and STs, and protect them from social injustice.

2. Faculty reservation uses the institution as the unit — The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019 treats the whole university or institution, rather than each department, as the unit for calculating reserved teaching posts. It was passed after controversy over a department-wise roster that sharply reduced reserved posts. Institutes of National Importance, such as the IITs under the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961, are declared by an Act of Parliament and enjoy wide academic autonomy. The NTF's faculty data show that access for students has moved much faster than diversity among teachers.

3. Indian law now treats suicide as a mental health issue, not 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 or punished, and requires the government to provide care and rehabilitation. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 does not carry forward the general offence of attempted suicide under Section 309 of the IPC. Abetment of suicide remains an offence under Section 108 of the BNS. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy of 2022 aims to reduce suicide mortality by 10% by 2030, and Tele MANAS, the national tele-mental health helpline, is reachable at 14416.

4. Sociology explains why integration, not only access, prevents dropout — Emile Durkheim's study of suicide argued that suicide rates depend on how well individuals are integrated into social groups, with "egoistic" suicide linked to weak integration and "anomic" suicide to a breakdown of norms. Research on student retention similarly finds that academic and social integration predict whether students stay. The NTF's idea of "low academic integration" caused by a social mismatch between students and faculty applies this insight to Indian campuses. Access through reservation is necessary, but without integration it does not guarantee completion.
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<tr><td>WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)</td><td>
1. GS1 and GS2 both cover this ground — GS1 covers social empowerment, caste and the role of education, and GS2 covers the welfare of vulnerable sections and issues relating to education and health. UPSC has asked about the persistence of caste in modern institutions, and the NTF data give such an answer numbers from a court-appointed body.

2. A new angle on a story already covered — The IIT Bombay death and the UGC equity regulations were carded yesterday. The new development is the NTF interim report's data and IIT Bombay's removal of the dean. Keep the two apart: the report is about structural causes, the dean's removal is about one case under investigation.
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<tr><td>PRELIMS NUGGETS</td><td>
• Article 15(5), inserted by the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2005, allows
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	special provisions for admission of backward classes, SCs and STs to educational institutions, including private unaided ones, other than minority institutions. ● Article 46 directs the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, in particular SCs and STs. ● The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019 treats the university or institution as the unit for reservation in teaching posts. ● Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 presumes that a person who attempts suicide is suffering from severe stress and shall not be tried and punished. ● Abetment of suicide is an offence under Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. ● Tele MANAS, the national tele-mental health programme, can be reached on the toll-free number 14416. ● Institutes of National Importance are declared by an Act of Parliament.
ANALYSIS	1. **The dropout data is evidence of exclusion, not merely of weak preparation —** The common explanation for dropout among reserved-category students is that they enter with lower scores and cannot cope. The NTF notes that dropouts happened despite fee waivers and stipends, which rules out money as the main reason and points toward academic or other stress. When combined with 34% of students feeling like outsiders, the pattern suggests that the institution, not only the student, is failing. The counter-view is that preparation gaps are real, but they are an argument for bridge courses and mentoring, not for accepting dropout. 2. **Faculty diversity is the most neglected lever —** With 7.57% SC and 1.91% ST faculty in Institutes of National Importance, far below the reserved shares, many disadvantaged students never meet a teacher who shares their background. Role models and mentors matter for integration, and a faculty that does not reflect the student body is less likely to see the "vibe check" exclusion the report describes. Institutions often say suitable candidates are not available, but the 2019 Teachers' Cadre Act exists precisely to stop posts being quietly left vacant. Filling reserved faculty posts is a policy choice institutions can make now. 3. **Faculty attitudes cited in the report are themselves part of the problem —** The report records that some faculty linked intense competition to "reservation politics" and complained of students demanding grade revisions. These views may reflect genuine frustration, but when teachers see reserved-category students as a cause of stress, those students sense it. That is exactly the climate that produces the feeling of being an outsider. Training faculty to recognise bias, which Professor Manjaly also recommends, is therefore not a soft measure but central to prevention. 4. **Counselling alone treats distress as a private problem —** The IE op-ed argues that universities outsource well-being to counsellors, placing distress "inside the student" while the institution appears neutral. The NTF's findings support this: grading systems, grievance procedures and campus hierarchies produce stress that therapy cannot remove. Counselling saves lives in a crisis and must expand, but prevention requires changes to evaluation, grievance redress and student participation in governance. An institution that measures its response by the number of counsellors hired is measuring the wrong thing. 5. **Accountability after a death must be fair to everyone involved —** IIT Bombay removed the dean from an administrative post while the investigation continues, and apologised for its earlier statement about the circumstances of the student's death. Students want more; the Faculty Forum defends the professor. The institution's task is to allow the police and inquiry to reach findings without either protecting or

	scapegoating an individual. Structural reform, which the NTF recommends, does not depend on the outcome of any single case.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Access to elite higher education has widened faster than inclusion within it." Discuss in the light of the National Task Force's interim report on student mental health and suicides. Suggest measures to make campuses more inclusive. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Introduce the Supreme Court-appointed NTF, set up in March 2025, and its 211-page interim report, with the headline figure of over 13,600 disadvantaged students dropping out of premier institutions between 2018 and 2023. 2. **Body — the evidence of exclusion —** Use the figures: about 60% of students from SC, ST or OBC groups against 56% of faculty from advantaged groups; 7.57% SC and 1.91% ST faculty in INIs; 34% of students feeling like outsiders; the "vibe check" and competition culture. 3. **Body — constitutional and legal framework —** Cite Articles 15(4), 15(5) and 46, the 2006 and 2019 reservation Acts, and Section 115 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. Use Durkheim's idea of integration to explain why access without belonging leads to dropout. 4. **Body — measures —** Suggest filling reserved faculty posts, mentoring and bridge programmes, faculty training on bias, systematic screening and integrated reporting by hostel staff, transparent grading and grievance processes, student representation in governance and annual well-being audits. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that the success of affirmative action should be measured by graduation and well-being, not by admission alone.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Director of an IIT after a student's suicide leads to protests alleging caste discrimination. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would first meet the family and students, express grief without making claims about the circumstances, and ensure the police inquiry has full cooperation. I would set up an independent inquiry with external members, including a member from the SC or ST community, and publish its terms of reference. I would also start structural steps at once, such as a review of grievance processes and faculty training, so that students see change that does not depend on one case. Transparency is the best answer to mistrust. **Q2. An interview board asks: is reservation responsible for the competitive stress on campuses?** ***Approach:*** No, competition is intense because a small number of seats and jobs are sought by a huge number of students, and that applies to all categories. Reservation widens who competes, but it does not create the scarcity. Blaming reservation shifts attention from grading systems and campus culture, which the NTF identifies as causes. Stress falls when institutions support students, not when they narrow access. **Q3. As a hostel warden, how would you identify students at risk?** ***Approach:*** I would know students by name, notice changes such as missed meals, withdrawal or falling attendance, and keep a confidential channel to the counselling centre. I would encourage peer mentors from senior batches, including students from similar backgrounds, to check on first-year students. I would not treat distress as indiscipline. The NTF notes that institutions learn of crises too late, and wardens are often the first adults who can see them.

8.3 Jamui Mob Assault on Two Class 10 Students Brings POCSO Case, NCW Action, Three Arrests

THE NEWS Jamui, Bihar. Two Class 10 students, a girl and a boy, were allegedly groped and assaulted by a group of men in Bihar's Jamui district on Saturday, September 19, at around 7 p.m., The Hindu reports. Accounts differ in detail. The Hindu, quoting Superintendent of Police Vishwajit Dayal, says the two were returning from a coaching class on the Jamui-Lakhisarai road when six to seven men, some masked, stopped them. The Indian Express reports that shortly after tuition, at about half past six, the two went on a scooter ride to the hilly outskirts about three kilometres from the main road and were confronted by seven or eight young men, who assaulted the boy and molested the girl. Videos show the teenagers apologising and promising never to return, some men shouting that they should be married, and a masked man lifting the girl and running with her until the boy chased him; when the boy said their families knew of their friendship, a man slapped him and said, "If they know, then call them." The videos went viral on Monday. The Hindu says no formal complaint was made and police took suo motu cognisance and registered FIR No. 428/2026; the Express, quoting ADG (Law and Order) K.S. Anupam, says the girl told her family on the night of September 20 and her father filed a written complaint on September 21. Three persons have been arrested, whom the Express says are believed to be minors. A woman ASI recorded the girl's statement at her home, and SDPO Dipti Monali, who heads an SIT, confirmed an FIR under the POCSO Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Police are checking whether a patrol should have been present and are acting to take the videos down, since circulating videos of minors is an offence. The National Commission for Women took suo motu cognisance; chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar wrote to the Bihar DGP, and the NCW directed security, legal help and counselling for the victims and sought an Action Taken Report. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called it patriarchy: "the belief that any man can police a girl's body, her movement, her choice". Tejashwi Yadav said Bihar had been "shamed", while JD(U) State president Umesh Kushwaha called it an "isolated incident (chutput ghatna)". The syllabus link is women's safety, child protection and moral policing.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Patriarchal norms treat a girl's movement and friendships as community property → a group of men stop two teenagers on a road and punish them for being together → the act is filmed and the videos go viral, adding a second injury → police register a POCSO case and arrest three, NCW and the State women's commission step in → political blame follows while the question of patrols and video circulation remains

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **POCSO defines a child by age and sets graded offences —** The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below 18 years and is gender-neutral. Section 7 defines sexual assault as touching with sexual intent, punishable under Section 8 with imprisonment of not less than three years, extendable to five years. Section 11 defines sexual harassment, including showing, following or threatening a child, punishable under Section 12 with up to three years. Section 19 makes reporting mandatory for anyone who knows of an offence, and Section 21 punishes failure to report.

2. **The Act protects the child during investigation and in the media —** Section 24 of POCSO requires the child's statement to be recorded at the child's residence or a place of the child's choice, as far as practicable by a woman police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector, and not in uniform. Section 23 bars the media from disclosing the child's identity, including name, address, photograph or school. Section 15 punishes storing or transmitting pornographic material involving a child, and Section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 punishes publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts. Special Courts under Section 28 must try cases, and Section 35 sets one year for completing the trial.

3. **The BNS covers assault on women, and the Juvenile Justice Act covers accused minors —** Section 74 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 punishes assault or criminal force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty, and Section 75 punishes sexual harassment, replacing Sections 354 and 354A of the IPC. Where the accused are under 18, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 applies, and cases go before a Juvenile Justice Board. Only for "heinous offences", those with a minimum punishment of seven years, can a 16-18 year old be assessed for trial as an adult.

	POCSO sexual assault under Section 8 carries a minimum of three years, so it is not a heinous offence. 4. **The NCW is a statutory body that can act on its own —** The National Commission for Women was set up in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990. It has a chairperson, five members and a member-secretary nominated by the Central government. Section 10 empowers it to look into complaints and take suo motu notice of matters relating to deprivation of women's rights and non-implementation of laws, and while investigating it has the powers of a civil court. It can recommend action but cannot itself prosecute, which is why it writes to the police and seeks an Action Taken Report.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **GS1 lists women's issues and GS2 lists vulnerable sections —** UPSC has asked about the safety of women in public spaces, the effectiveness of POCSO and the role of statutory commissions. A case that combines moral policing, child protection and viral video circulation allows an answer to cover patriarchy, law and technology together. 2. **Moral policing is a recurring sociology and ethics theme —** Vigilante punishment of couples raises questions about the relationship between community norms and individual rights. In Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court held that khap panchayats and similar groups cannot interfere with the choices of consenting adults. The Jamui case involves minors, but the social logic of the mob is the same.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years and is gender-neutral. • Section 19 of the POCSO Act, 2012 makes reporting of an offence mandatory, and Section 21 punishes failure to report. • Section 23 of the POCSO Act prohibits the media from disclosing the identity of a child victim. • Section 24 of the POCSO Act requires the child's statement to be recorded, as far as practicable, by a woman police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector, at the child's residence or place of choice. • Section 74 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 punishes assault or criminal force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty. • The National Commission for Women was constituted in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990. • Under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, a child aged 16 to 18 alleged to have committed a heinous offence, one with a minimum punishment of seven years, may be assessed for trial as an adult.
ANALYSIS	1. **This was punishment for breaking a social rule, which makes it moral policing, not random crime —** The men did not stop the teenagers to rob them; they stopped them because a girl and a boy were together, shouted that they should be married and humiliated them. That is the enforcement of a community norm by self-appointed guardians. It explains why the girl did not tell her family and the boy's mother learned of it from Instagram: the victims feared being blamed for breaking the rule. Policing that treats this only as molestation will miss the social mechanism that produced it. 2. **The viral video is a second assault, and the state is slow to stop it —** Filming and circulating the humiliation spreads the harm to every viewer and makes it permanent. The police acted only when the video went viral, which shows the double role of social media: it forced action, but at the cost of the victims' dignity. Circulating such videos is an offence under POCSO Section 15 and the IT Act, yet takedown depends on platforms and on police follow-up. Rapid takedown protocols with platforms should be

	as routine as registering an FIR. 3. **If the accused are minors, the justice system must answer two questions at once —** The Express reports that the three arrested are believed to be minors. Under the Juvenile Justice Act they go before a Board, and since POCSO sexual assault is not a heinous offence, they cannot be tried as adults. Public anger will demand harsh punishment, but the more useful question is how teenage boys learned that policing a girl is their right. Rehabilitation that addresses those attitudes is more likely to prevent repeat offending than detention alone. 4. **Procedure for the child victim needs attention even in a quick response —** Police recorded the girl's statement at home, which POCSO requires, but it was recorded by an ASI, while Section 24 prefers a woman officer of at least sub-inspector rank as far as practicable. The two papers also give different accounts of whether the FIR was suo motu or on the father's complaint, and of the time and place. Such details matter at trial, where defence lawyers exploit inconsistencies. A careful early investigation protects the victim's case as much as a fast one. 5. **Political blame is predictable, but "isolated incident" is the wrong frame —** The opposition called it a failure of law and order and of the ruling party's values; the JD(U) chief called it an isolated incident and compared it with Bihar before 2005. Neither response addresses the question the police themselves raised: whether a patrol should have been present on that road at that hour. Calling it isolated denies that public spaces are unsafe for girls in a pattern that surveys have long shown. The measure of the government's response will be patrolling, speedy trial and victim support, not statements.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Moral policing is patriarchy acting in the name of culture." Examine this statement in the context of recent incidents of vigilante violence against young people in public spaces. Evaluate the adequacy of the legal framework for protecting children and women from such violence. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** Describe the Jamui incident of September 19: two Class 10 students stopped and assaulted by a group of men, videos gone viral, a POCSO FIR, three arrests and NCW suo motu action. 2. **Body — the social mechanism —** Explain moral policing as enforcement of community norms on a girl's movement and friendships, linking it to patriarchy, honour and fear of stigma, which explains the victims' silence. Mention Shakti Vahini (2018) on vigilante interference in personal choices. 3. **Body — the legal framework —** Cover POCSO Sections 7, 8, 11, 19, 23 and 24; BNS Sections 74 and 75; Section 67B of the IT Act on circulation; the Juvenile Justice Act for accused minors; and the NCW's powers under Section 10 of its Act. 4. **Body — gaps and remedies —** Discuss delayed reporting, video circulation and takedown, patrolling of vulnerable stretches, the need for trained women officers and quick Special Court trials, and community sensitisation in schools and coaching centres, including of boys. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that laws punish the act but cannot by themselves change the belief that a girl's movement belongs to the community, which needs education and visible, consistent enforcement.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are the Superintendent of Police in Jamui when the video goes viral. What are your priorities?** ***Approach:*** My first priority is the safety and privacy of the two children: protection at

home, counselling, and ensuring their identity is not disclosed. Second, I would register the FIR, identify all accused from the video and arrest them, with the case handled by a trained team and the girl's statement recorded in line with Section 24 of POCSO. Third, I would contact platforms to take the video down and act against those sharing it. Finally, I would review patrolling on that stretch and publish a helpline for students returning from coaching.

Q2. An interview board asks: why do victims of such incidents often not report them?

Approach: Victims, especially girls, fear being blamed for being out with a friend, fear family restrictions, and fear that reporting will spread the shame further. Here, the children did not tell their parents out of fear, as the boy's mother said. Institutions must make reporting safe by protecting identity and treating the victim with respect. Where reporting is safe, silence gives way to complaints.

Q3. As District Magistrate, what longer-term steps would you take after this incident?

Approach: I would work with schools and coaching centres on safe transport and timing, and with the police on patrols on isolated roads in the evening. I would start awareness programmes in schools on consent, respect and the law, including for boys, since the accused may be teenagers. I would ensure the Special Court has what it needs for a quick trial. I would also involve panchayat and community leaders, since moral policing draws its legitimacy from local approval.

9. Internal Security

Both stories today are about security in domains where the state does not own the infrastructure. In orbit, a superpower has declared weapons on satellites that sit beside the civilian and commercial systems every modern economy runs on, under a treaty written before most of those systems existed. Online, Indian child-protection enforcement has depended on a private American clearinghouse, and only now are the platforms agreeing to report directly to Indian authorities. In both, the real question is not capability but accountability: who can see what is happening, and who answers for it.

9.1 US Admits Deploying 'On-Orbit Space Control Weapons', Exposing the Outer Space Treaty's Conventional-Weapons Gap

THE NEWS Washington and New Delhi. U.S. Air Force Secretary Troy Meink admitted on September 14, and Space Force chief Gen. Douglas Schiess confirmed, that the United States has deployed "on-orbit space control weapons" to "defend against hostile adversary action", The Hindu reports in its lead editorial "Unsafe space" on Tuesday. On-orbit means stationed in space rather than fired from the ground. The Hindu says the admission is cause for concern because satellite systems increasingly underpin communications, energy and financial networks and many commercial systems serve both civilian and military users — the meaning of dual-use. Mr. Meink described the weapon as defensive, but the editorial notes that U.S. military doctrine defines "space control" as including both offensive and defensive operations, and that what counts as "hostile action" and what the weapon can do remain unclear. It warns of confusion when two steerable satellites approach each other without knowing the other's intentions, including future AI-run autonomous satellites. The editorial observes that the Outer Space Treaty does not ban weapons in orbit as such: Article IV prohibits nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in orbit, and Article III requires space activities to follow international law. When an autonomous, dual-use asset run by a commercial company strikes in "defence", it says, the Liability Convention cannot easily assign accountability. It asks the U.N. Open-Ended Working Group on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) to take up the disclosure and the U.S. to reveal the weapons' particulars and join a multilateral arrangement defining thresholds of action and escalation. The Economic Times editorial "Don't Allow US to Weaponise Space" says Moscow and Beijing have called on Washington to stop, recalls that the U.S. Space Force was created in 2019 to counter Chinese and Russian counter-space capabilities, and notes that the arsenal now includes lasers and microwave technology able to disable satellites. It counts more than 18,000 operational satellites and at least 120 conflicts under way on Earth, and asks the UN to step in. The Hindu adds that the U.S., Russia, China and India have been developing counter-space capabilities. The Indian Express reports that the space arms race is among the issues expected at the meeting of Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington from September 23 to 25. The syllabus link is GS3 on security challenges and awareness in the field of space.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty bans only nuclear and mass-destruction weapons in orbit → the U.S., Russia, China and India develop counter-space capabilities, including India's Mission Shakti in 2019 → the U.S. creates the Space Force in 2019 → satellites multiply to over 18,000 and become dual-use and commercial → the U.S. admits on September 14 that it has deployed on-orbit space control weapons, and editorials call for multilateral governance

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The Outer Space Treaty bans mass destruction, not weapons —** The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, 1967, is the foundation of space law. Article IV forbids placing nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies, and says the Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, with no military bases or weapons testing there. It does not prohibit conventional weapons in orbit around the earth. Article II bars national appropriation of outer space, Article VI makes states internationally responsible for national activities including those of private companies, and Article IX requires due regard for others and consultation before potentially harmful activities.

2. **Five UN treaties make up the space law regime —** The Outer Space Treaty (1967) was followed by the Rescue Agreement (1968), the Liability Convention (1972), the Registration Convention (1975) and the Moon Agreement (1979). Under the Liability

	Convention, a launching state is absolutely liable for damage its space object causes on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight, but liable only on proof of fault for damage caused to another space object in space. India is a party to the first four and has signed but not ratified the Moon Agreement. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), set up by the UN General Assembly in 1959, is the main forum for these rules. 3. **PAROS has been discussed for four decades without a treaty —** The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space has been on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva since the early 1980s, and the UN General Assembly passes resolutions on it every year. Russia and China have proposed a draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, which Western states say does not cover ground-based anti-satellite weapons and cannot be verified. Western states have favoured norms of responsible behaviour instead. Open-ended working groups under the General Assembly are the latest attempt to bridge the two approaches. 4. **India is itself a counter-space power —** On March 27, 2019, under Mission Shakti, the DRDO destroyed an Indian satellite in low earth orbit with a ground-launched anti-satellite missile, making India the fourth country after the U.S., Russia and China to demonstrate the capability. India chose a low orbit of about 300 km so that debris would decay quickly. The same year India created the Defence Space Agency under the Integrated Defence Staff and the Defence Space Research Organisation. India's stated position is that it opposes the weaponisation of outer space and supports multilateral efforts to preserve it for peaceful uses.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **Space and security appear together in the GS3 syllabus —** GS3 lists "awareness in the fields of IT, space, computers" and "security challenges and their management". UPSC has asked about India's space programme, space debris and anti-satellite capability. The weaponisation of space ties science and technology to security in a way examiners like. 2. **Prelims regularly tests treaties and their provisions —** Questions on the Outer Space Treaty, the Moon Agreement and India's status under them are standard. The trap is often the assumption that the Outer Space Treaty bans all weapons in space, when it bans only nuclear and mass-destruction weapons in orbit. 3. **Linked to IR and the essay —** The collapse of arms control between major powers and the rise of dual-use technology are strong essay themes. Space is a clean example of a global commons, alongside the high seas and Antarctica.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Article IV of the Outer Space Treaty, 1967, prohibits placing nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction in orbit around the earth, but does not expressly prohibit conventional weapons in orbit. • Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty makes states internationally responsible for national activities in outer space, including those carried on by non-governmental entities. • Under the Liability Convention, 1972, a launching state is absolutely liable for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight. • India is a signatory to the Moon Agreement, 1979, but has not ratified it. • The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1959. • Mission Shakti (March 27, 2019) was India's anti-satellite missile test conducted by the DRDO against a satellite in low earth orbit.

	• The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) is an agenda item of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.
ANALYSIS	1. **The word "defensive" means little when the same weapon can do both —** A weapon that can disable an approaching satellite can also disable a satellite that is not approaching; the difference lies in intent, which other states cannot see. This is the classic security dilemma: one state's defensive measure looks offensive to its rivals, who then build their own. The Hindu's point that U.S. doctrine defines space control as both offensive and defensive makes the label almost meaningless. Without disclosure of what the weapons can do, Russia and China will assume the worst, and so will others. 2. **The Outer Space Treaty's gap was deliberate, and it has become dangerous —** In 1967 the fear was nuclear bombs in orbit, and the treaty dealt with that. Conventional weapons were left out partly because they were not yet practical and partly because both superpowers wanted freedom to use space for military support. Today, as The Hindu notes, a conventional strike on a network that runs banking, power and communications can cause mass damage without being a weapon of mass destruction in the legal sense. The line in Article IV has become, in the editorial's word, fluid. Closing the gap would need either a new treaty or an agreed interpretation of what counts as a weapon of mass disruption. 3. **Commercial and autonomous satellites break the liability chain —** The Liability Convention assumes a launching state, a space object and a damage event. If a privately operated satellite carrying AI decides on its own to strike another satellite in self-defence, it is unclear whether the state is liable only on proof of fault, whether the strike is an armed attack, and whether the operator is a combatant. Under Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty, states are responsible for their private operators, but that responsibility was written for launches and broadcasting, not for weapons. International humanitarian law's principle of distinction also becomes difficult when one satellite serves both armies and hospitals. 4. **India cannot credibly oppose weaponisation without clarity on its own capability —** India has an anti-satellite capability, a Defence Space Agency and a growing commercial space industry after the 2023 Indian Space Policy. It argues against weaponisation, but, as The Hindu notes, it is among the states developing counter-space capabilities. That is not hypocrisy, since deterrence requires capability, but it does mean India's voice in PAROS will carry weight only if it offers something concrete, such as a moratorium on destructive anti-satellite tests or transparency about the purpose of its assets. The counter-view is that India, as a late entrant, should not constrain itself while others already have deployed weapons. 5. **Great-power summits, not UN working groups, may decide the outcome —** The Indian Express notes that the space arms race is on the agenda of the Xi–Trump summit. History suggests that arms control in new domains begins with bilateral understandings between the leading powers, as with U.S.–Soviet nuclear treaties, before it becomes multilateral. A bilateral U.S.–China understanding on space, if it happens, would shape the rules for everyone else. India's task is to ensure that such rules do not freeze existing advantages and leave emerging space powers out.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Outer Space Treaty was written to keep nuclear weapons out of orbit; it was never designed for a crowded, commercial and armed space." In the light of the U.S. admission of deploying on-orbit weapons, examine the adequacy of the international legal regime for outer space and suggest a role for India. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the development: the U.S. Air Force Secretary's September 14 admission, confirmed by the Space Force chief, of on-orbit space control weapons, and

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the editorials’ call for multilateral governance.

2. Body — the existing regime — Explain Articles III, IV and VI of the Outer Space Treaty, the Liability Convention’s fault-based standard in space, and the long-stalled PAROS agenda. Note that only nuclear and mass-destruction weapons are banned in orbit.

3. Body — why it is inadequate — Discuss dual-use and commercial satellites, over 18,000 operational satellites, autonomous AI-driven systems, ambiguity of “defensive” and “hostile action”, and the difficulty of applying humanitarian law in orbit.

4. Body — India’s role — Cover India’s Mission Shakti, Defence Space Agency and commercial space growth; propose transparency measures, a destructive ASAT test moratorium, rules of the road for close approaches, and active work in the PAROS working group and COPUOS.

5. Conclusion — Conclude that India needs both deterrent capability and a strong voice for rules, since a conflict in space would hurt emerging space economies most.
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<td>ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH</td>
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Q1. You head the Defence Space Agency. An unknown foreign satellite manoeuvres close to an Indian military communications satellite. What steps do you take?
Approach: I would first confirm the manoeuvre through our own tracking and ISRO’s space situational awareness systems, and assess whether the approach is threatening or routine. I would inform the Chief of Defence Staff and the Ministry of Defence, and consider moving our satellite if the risk is real. Through the Ministry of External Affairs, I would seek clarification from the state that registered the satellite. Documenting the event carefully matters, because it may later support India’s position in multilateral forums.

Q2. As Secretary, Department of Space, a private Indian satellite company asks whether it can sell imaging services to a foreign military. How do you decide?
Approach: Under Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty, India is responsible for the activities of its private operators, so I would treat this as an export and security question, not just a commercial one. I would consult IN-SPACe, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of External Affairs on whether the buyer is engaged in a conflict and whether the service could be used against civilians. Conditions on use, end-user certification and a right to suspend service would be part of any approval. Commercial growth is important, but India must not become liable for harm done with its assets.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India, having tested an anti-satellite weapon, criticise the U.S. for placing weapons in space?
Approach: There is a difference between a one-time test that showed capability and a standing deployment of weapons in orbit, though both add to mistrust. India can consistently argue that deterrence capability is necessary while also supporting rules that limit its use, much as it did in the nuclear field. Criticism would be more credible if India offered measures of its own, such as transparency about its assets or support for a moratorium on destructive tests. The aim should be rules that protect everyone’s satellites, including India’s growing civilian and commercial fleet.
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9.2 Google Follows Meta in Reporting Child Sexual Abuse Material Directly to MHA’s I4C, Bypassing US Clearinghouse

THE NEWS New Delhi. Google India will report all child sexual abuse material (CSAM) detected on its platforms directly to the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), a Google spokesperson told The Economic Times on Monday, September 21. CSAM means any photograph, video or other material depicting the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child; courts and child-rights bodies now prefer this term to “child pornography”, which wrongly suggests consent. The I4C, an office attached to the Ministry of Home Affairs, manages the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal. The move comes days after

Meta, which owns Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, agreed to report child sexual abuse cases to appropriate law enforcement agencies in India; the ET says both companies will now proactively report such material. “Google is deeply committed to fighting CSAM online and preventing its platforms from being used to create, store or distribute such material,” the spokesperson said, adding: “As part of our ongoing discussions with the Government of India, we have respectfully proposed to operationalise the provision of relevant information to the I4C in cases related to CSAM.” The ET explains that Google was always legally obliged to report these crimes, but it currently sends CyberTipline reports to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), a U.S.-based non-profit that has historically forwarded them to law enforcement in various countries, and that this roundabout process creates delays and makes catching perpetrators difficult. The paper reports growing official concern: the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the National Human Rights Commission had begun independent enquiries into advertisements of child-abuse content on Meta-owned platforms in India, and Meta India managing director and country head Arun Srinivas had been summoned by the NCPCR twice in the previous month. An official told the ET last week that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has also been engaging with other platforms to proactively identify and remove such content. Google says it uses automated detection and human review, besides reports from users and third parties such as NGOs. In an ET podcast, lawyer Sajan Poovayya argues that algorithmic amplification — platforms’ recommendation systems pushing content to more users — and weak enforcement remain the real gaps. The syllabus link is GS3 on the role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges and cyber security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

U.S. law requires platforms to report CSAM to NCMEC’s CyberTipline → NCMEC forwards Indian cases to Indian authorities, causing delays → CSAM advertisements on Meta platforms prompt NCPCR and NHRC enquiries and summons to Meta India’s head → Meta agrees to report directly to Indian law enforcement → Google follows by proposing direct reporting to the MHA’s I4C

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The IT Act punishes CSAM more severely than other obscene content —** Section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000, inserted in 2008, punishes publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts, as well as creating, collecting, seeking, browsing, downloading, advertising or exchanging such material, and facilitating online abuse of children. The punishment is imprisonment of up to five years and a fine of up to ₹10 lakh on first conviction, and up to seven years and a fine of up to ₹10 lakh on a subsequent conviction. Section 79 gives intermediaries safe harbour from liability for third-party content only if they observe due diligence. Under the IT Rules, 2021, significant social media intermediaries must endeavour to deploy technology-based measures, including automated tools, to proactively identify child sexual abuse material.

2. **POCSO makes storing, sharing and failing to report CSAM offences —** Section 15 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, as amended in 2019, punishes storing or possessing pornographic material involving a child without deleting, destroying or reporting it to the designated authority, as well as storing it for transmission or for commercial purposes. In Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish (2024), the Supreme Court held that viewing, possessing or storing such material can be an offence under Section 15 of POCSO and Section 67B of the IT Act, and urged Parliament to replace the term “child pornography” with “child sexual exploitative and abuse material”. Section 19 of POCSO requires any person who knows of an offence to report it to the police or the Special Juvenile Police Unit.

3. **The I4C coordinates cyber policing in a federal system where police is a State subject —** Police and public order are in the State List of the Seventh Schedule, so cybercrime investigation is mostly done by State police. The Ministry of Home Affairs set up the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, inaugurated in January 2020, to coordinate the response of law enforcement agencies across States, and it runs the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the 1930 helpline for financial fraud. Direct reports from platforms to the I4C can therefore be routed quickly to the State police with jurisdiction. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is a statutory body under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.

	4. **NCMEC became the world's CSAM clearinghouse because of U.S. law —** Under U.S. federal law, electronic service providers based in the United States must report apparent child sexual abuse material they become aware of to the CyberTipline run by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, a private non-profit. NCMEC then refers reports involving other countries to the authorities there. Since 2019, reports relating to India have been received by Indian authorities through an arrangement between the National Crime Records Bureau and NCMEC and passed to State police. Because the largest platforms are American, most reports of CSAM involving Indian users have travelled through the U.S. before reaching India.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. **The syllabus names social media and cyber security explicitly —** GS3 lists the "role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges" and "basics of cyber security". UPSC has asked about cyber threats, the IT Act and the regulation of intermediaries. A shift in how platforms report child-abuse material brings together cyber policing, child rights and platform regulation. 2. **Prelims tests institutions and their parent ministries —** Questions on which ministry runs the I4C or CERT-In, which Act sets up NCPCR, and which section of the IT Act deals with an offence are typical. The distinction between the I4C under the Ministry of Home Affairs and CERT-In under MeitY is a common trap. 3. **Links to GS2 and ethics —** Child protection is a GS2 theme on vulnerable sections, and the balance between privacy, encryption and child safety is a GS4 dilemma. The Supreme Court's 2024 judgment on POCSO gives an up-to-date legal anchor.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• Section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 punishes publishing, transmitting, browsing, downloading or exchanging material depicting children in sexually explicit acts. • The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs and manages the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal. • Section 15 of the POCSO Act, 2012, as amended in 2019, punishes storage or possession of child pornographic material without deleting, destroying or reporting it. • Under the IT Rules, 2021, a significant social media intermediary shall endeavour to deploy technology-based measures, including automated tools, to proactively identify child sexual abuse material. • The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights is a statutory body constituted under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005. • Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 exempts an intermediary from liability for third-party information only if it observes due diligence and does not initiate, select or modify the transmission. • 'Police' and 'public order' are subjects in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
ANALYSIS	1. **Direct reporting is a gain in speed, and speed is what child protection needs —** The ET is right that the NCMEC route creates delays: a report generated in India travels to a U.S. non-profit, is processed there and then comes back. For a child who is being abused now, every day matters. Direct reporting to the I4C, which can pass it immediately to State police, shortens the chain. It also gives Indian authorities the same data at the same time as it reaches the U.S., rather than depending on another country's priorities. This is a practical gain that does not need new legislation. 2. **Pressure from statutory commissions, not a new law, produced the change —** The sequence is telling: NCPCR and NHRC enquiries, two summons to Meta India's head,

	then Meta's agreement, then Google's. Statutory commissions used their power to summon and question to obtain a result that years of rules had not. This shows that the existing framework — Section 79 due diligence, the IT Rules and POCSO — is adequate on paper and weak in enforcement. The counter-view is that such pressure is ad hoc, and that a clear rule applying to all platforms would be fairer and more durable than company-by-company negotiation. 3. **More reports will mean nothing without capacity in State police —** Platforms detect material in very large volumes, and a shift to direct reporting will send many more reports to Indian agencies. Police is a State subject, and many State cyber cells are understaffed and lack forensic tools and trained officers. If reports pile up unexamined, faster reporting will simply move the delay from the U.S. to India. The I4C's value lies in triage — identifying the reports that point to a child in danger now — and in building State capacity, not just in receiving data. 4. **Removal and reporting do not fix amplification —** Poovayya's point in the ET podcast is that the real gap lies in algorithms that push harmful content to more users and in weak enforcement. Reporting deals with material after it is found; it does not stop recommendation systems from spreading it or advertising systems from carrying it, which is what the NCPCR enquiry into Meta concerned. A serious response would require platforms to audit how their recommendation and advertising systems handle child-abuse content. That is harder to agree than a reporting channel, which is perhaps why it has not been agreed. 5. **Data sovereignty here serves children, but the principle can be stretched —** Direct reporting to an Indian agency is a form of data sovereignty — Indian data reaching Indian law enforcement without passing through another country. In the case of CSAM, there is little privacy argument against it, because the material is illegal everywhere. The risk is that the same channel is later expanded to other content where the case is less clear, such as political speech. Keeping the arrangement limited to CSAM, with clear safeguards and audit, would protect both children and the credibility of the channel.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Child sexual abuse material online is a borderless crime policed through national systems." In the light of Google and Meta agreeing to report such material directly to Indian authorities, examine the legal and institutional framework for tackling online child sexual abuse in India and suggest measures to strengthen it. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. **Introduction —** State the development: Google, following Meta, will report CSAM directly to the I4C under the Ministry of Home Affairs instead of relying only on NCMEC in the U.S. 2. **Body — legal framework —** Explain Section 67B and Section 79 of the IT Act, the IT Rules, 2021 on proactive detection, Section 15 of POCSO as amended in 2019, and the Supreme Court's 2024 judgment on possession and terminology. 3. **Body — institutional framework —** Describe the I4C, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, State police as the investigating agency, the NCPCR under the 2005 Act, and the earlier route through NCMEC and the NCRB. 4. **Body — gaps and measures —** Discuss delays in the old route, State cyber-cell capacity, algorithmic amplification and advertising, victim identification and rehabilitation, and the risk of mission creep; suggest triage protocols, training and forensic labs, audits of recommendation systems, and clear limits on the reporting channel. 5. **Conclusion —** Conclude that protecting children online needs cooperation between

	platforms, the Centre and States, with speed of action matched by capacity and safeguards.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	**Q1. You are Superintendent of Police in charge of a district cyber cell. The I4C forwards a platform report showing a child in your district is being abused and the material is being shared. What do you do?** ***Approach:*** I would treat it as an emergency, since a child may be in danger now. I would form a small team with a woman officer, trace the account and location through the platform and service providers under legal process, and coordinate with the Child Welfare Committee and the district child protection unit for the child's rescue and care. I would register an FIR under POCSO and the IT Act and preserve digital evidence carefully. The child's identity must be protected throughout, as POCSO requires. **Q2. As a Joint Secretary in MeitY, other platforms ask whether they too must report directly to the I4C. How do you respond?** ***Approach:*** I would explain that the IT Act and the IT Rules already require due diligence and, for large platforms, proactive detection of CSAM, and that direct reporting to Indian law enforcement is the most effective way to meet these obligations. I would offer a standard technical format and a single point of contact with the I4C so that the burden is low. I would also make clear that the channel is limited to CSAM and illegal material of this kind. A consistent approach across platforms is fairer than separate negotiations. **Q3. An interview board asks: should platforms be required to break end-to-end encryption to detect child abuse material?** ***Approach:*** This is a genuine conflict between privacy and child safety, both of which are protected values. Breaking encryption for everyone would weaken security for all users, including children, and could be misused for surveillance. Better approaches include detection on unencrypted parts of services, reporting tools for users, metadata-based signals and strong investigation once a report is made. The law should push platforms to do everything possible short of breaking encryption, and review the balance as technology changes.

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 Woman on the Roof and the Monkey the Law Forgot

SCENARIO You are the Municipal Commissioner of a hill-state capital. On August 30 a 63-year-old woman was attacked by a pack of rhesus macaques on the roof of her house and suffered grievous injuries, including spinal damage; she died on September 5. Your corporation records 50-55 monkey attacks every month. Until 2022 the rhesus macaque was a protected species under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and the State forest department handled capture, sterilisation and compensation. The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 removed it from the Act’s schedules. The Chief Wildlife Warden now says a monkey is “like a stray animal” and falls under civic bodies; the forest department still helps capture and sterilise monkeys but charges your corporation ₹700 per monkey, and the central funds it once received have stopped. Your staff are only now being trained to capture monkeys. Under the State’s wildlife compensation policy, death from a wild animal attack attracts ₹4 lakh, but officials indicate that the family is unlikely to qualify because the macaque is no longer covered by the Act. An NGO is protesting outside your office demanding ₹5 lakh for the family and action against people who feed monkeys. The family is poor, and the woman’s son asks you in public: “If the forest department is not responsible and you are not responsible, who killed my mother?” Your corporation has no budget head for such compensation, and the audit department has warned against any payment without legal sanction.

Q1. What are the ethical issues when a change in law leaves a citizen’s harm without an owner?

Q2. Can you, as Commissioner, find a lawful way to help the family, and should you?

Q3. What long-term steps would you take so that the next victim is not left in the same gap?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **The core issue is a governance vacuum, and vacuums are themselves a moral failure —** No individual official broke a rule, yet the outcome is that a woman died and the State says no one is responsible. The 2022 amendment changed the monkey’s legal status without transferring the funds, expertise and compensation framework to the bodies now expected to act. Accountability in public administration means that for every foreseeable public harm some authority must answer. The son’s question is therefore fair, and the Commissioner should not hide behind the technical answer that the law no longer covers macaques. The ethical starting point is to accept that the corporation, as the authority now in charge, owes the family at least a response.

2. **Compassion must work through lawful channels, not around them —** Paying ₹5 lakh from municipal funds without a budget head would violate financial rules and invite audit objections, and a Commissioner who pays irregularly sets a precedent he cannot sustain. But lawful options exist. He can recommend to the State government an ex gratia payment from the Chief Minister’s relief fund or the State disaster response mechanisms if the State notifies such attacks as a local disaster, seek a one-time sanction from the elected council, and link the family to social security schemes for which they are eligible. He should put all this in writing to the State within days, so that delay is not mistaken for indifference. The principle is that rules constrain the means, not the duty to try.

3. **Do not let the family bear the cost of an inter-departmental dispute —** The forest department and the corporation have competing interpretations of who is responsible, and the ₹700 per monkey fee shows each protecting its budget. The family should not have to wait for this dispute to be resolved. The Commissioner should escalate to the Chief Secretary for an immediate interim decision on responsibility and funding, while offering help to the family in parallel. Public servants owe citizens a single face of government, even when departments disagree internally.

4. **Address the cause as well as the case —** The State has sterilised 1,86,448 monkeys since 2006, and official figures show the estimated macaque population fell from 3,17,512 in 2004 to 1,36,443 in 2019-20, which suggests sterilisation works when sustained. The corporation should continue it with trained staff or through a formal agreement with the forest department, enforce a ban on public feeding, which experts say draws monkeys out of forests, and secure garbage and rooftop access in high-attack wards. A ward-level map of attacks can direct capture teams where they are most needed. Prevention is cheaper than compensation.

5. **Fix the policy gap that produced the tragedy —** The Commissioner should formally recommend that the State amend its compensation policy to cover attacks by animals removed from the Act's schedules, or create a separate scheme for human-animal conflict in urban areas, with a clear funding source. He should also ask that capture and sterilisation funding follow the transfer of responsibility to urban local bodies. A civil servant's duty includes telling the government, in writing, when its own policy is producing unjust outcomes.

6. **Communicate honestly with the family and the public —** The Commissioner should meet the family, explain what can and cannot be done under the law, and tell them the steps he has taken and the likely timeline. He should also meet the NGO and invite it to help with a public campaign against feeding monkeys. Honesty about the limits of one's power, combined with visible effort within those limits, builds more trust than either promises that cannot be kept or refusals behind rules.

Case 2 — The Camera Above the Counter

SCENARIO You are the Drugs Controller of a large State. The Union Health Ministry has issued a draft notification making CCTV surveillance mandatory at medical stores, with recordings kept for three months, to curb unauthorised sale of Schedule H, H1 and X drugs — prescription medicines that include strong antibiotics, psychotropic and habit-forming drugs. The measure was first proposed in 2021 to prevent drug abuse by children, and a senior member of the Drugs Consultative Committee has said publicly that cameras will "create fear" among pharmacists so that they do not sell such medicines to children without prescriptions. A national survey published in 2019 found that nearly 1.8% of children use opioids. Your State has about one drugs inspector for several hundred stores, and routine review of footage is impossible. The State chemists' association, part of the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists, says a store may have to spend nearly a lakh of rupees, that power cuts and poor connectivity in rural areas make compliance difficult, and that the cameras will violate patients' privacy. Many rural stores have daily sales of ₹5,000 to ₹10,000. Last month a 15-year-old in your State was hospitalised after overdosing on a sedative bought without a prescription from a small village store. His mother has written to you: "Put a camera in every shop. I would rather they lose a lakh than I lose a son." A women's health NGO has separately written that women buying contraceptives and HIV medicines are already afraid of being seen and may stop buying them if they know they are being filmed.

Q1. Identify the competing values and stakeholders in this case.

Q2. How would you implement the rule in your State so that it protects children without causing disproportionate harm?

Q3. Is creating "fear" an ethically acceptable instrument of regulation?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **The values in conflict are all legitimate —** The mother speaks for the protection of children, which is among the strongest duties of the State. The NGO speaks for privacy and access to sensitive health care, protected by Article 21 as interpreted in Puttaswamy (2017). The chemists speak for livelihood and proportionality of compliance cost, and rural patients for continued access to medicines if small stores close. The Drugs Controller must not treat any one of these as a trump card. The ethical task is to find the design that serves the strongest interest — protecting children — with the least harm to the others.

2. **Design the camera to watch the transaction, not the patient —** Cameras can be placed to capture the counter, the hands and the medicine handed over, rather than the customer's face, which is enough to show whether a child bought a controlled drug. Access to footage should be limited to authorised inspectors on a specific complaint or inspection, with a written record of each access. Footage should be deleted after the three-month period and must not be used for any other purpose. Chemists and customers should be told, by a notice, what is recorded and why. These safeguards meet the legality, legitimate aim and proportionality test and answer most of the NGO's concern.

3. **Phase the burden by risk and capacity —** A uniform deadline would hit the smallest rural stores hardest. The Controller should require cameras first in stores licensed to stock Schedule X drugs, stores with past violations and urban stores near schools and colleges, and give smaller stores longer timelines and allow simple offline recorders that do not need connectivity. He could also explore support through bank credit or a State subsidy for the smallest stores. Proportionality is not only a legal doctrine; it is also a sound way to allocate a scarce compliance budget.

4. **Fear is acceptable as deterrence only when it is fair and credible —** All law deters through the fear of consequences, and there is nothing unethical in making wrongdoers fear detection. What would be unethical is fear that falls on the honest and the guilty alike without any real chance of detection, which becomes mere harassment. Deterrence must therefore be backed by credible enforcement: surprise checks of footage in a random sample of stores, quick action on complaints and visible penalties. Otherwise the rule creates cost without protection, which fails both chemists and children.

5. **The camera is one tool; enforcement and prescription systems are the others —** The Schedule H1 register already requires chemists to record the prescriber, patient and quantity; the Controller should have inspectors audit these registers regularly. An app-based record of Schedule X sales, e-prescriptions linked to registered doctors, and school-based awareness can all reduce children's access. The Controller should also press for more inspectors, since no technology replaces an inspection cadre. The overdose case should itself be investigated and, if the violation is established, the licence suspended, to show that the rules have teeth.

6. **Respond to the mother and the NGO in person —** The Controller should reply to the mother, explaining what the State is doing and what action has been taken against the store that sold the sedative. He should meet the women's health NGO and include its suggestions in the State's implementation guidelines. A regulator who engages openly with all affected groups is more likely to design a rule that works and to secure compliance without coercion.

Case 3 — The Video That Came Before the Complaint

> ***SCENARIO*** You are the Superintendent of Police of a district in Bihar. On a Saturday evening two Class 10 students, a girl and a boy who study together and whose families know of their friendship, went on a scooter ride to the hilly outskirts of the town after their coaching class. A group of seven or eight young men surrounded them, slapped the boy, and molested the girl; videos show the two repeatedly apologising and promising never to return, some men shouting that the two should be married, and a masked man lifting the girl and running off with her until the boy chased him. The girl did not tell her family. Two days later the videos went viral, national outrage followed, opposition leaders called the incident "deeply disturbing", and the National Commission for Women took suo motu cognisance. Your police registered an FIR and arrested three persons, who are believed to be minors. The State's Additional Director General has explained that the delay occurred because the victim did not report. Television channels are now broadcasting blurred clips, and local groups are sharing the unblurred videos in messaging groups. A local leader has told reporters that "children who roam in lonely places invite trouble". The girl's family wants the case closed quietly to protect her marriage prospects; the boy's family wants maximum publicity so that the attackers are punished. Your senior officers want a quick press conference announcing more arrests.

Q1. What are your immediate legal and ethical duties towards the two children?

Q2. How do you handle the viral videos, the media and the families' opposite demands?

Q3. How should the police respond to the moral-policing mindset revealed in this incident?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **The children are victims, and the law puts their dignity first —** Both are minors, and the girl was sexually assaulted, which attracts the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. POCSO requires that the child's statement be recorded in a child-friendly manner, preferably at her home or a place of her choice, by a woman officer not in uniform, and that her identity not be disclosed. The police must also ensure medical care, counselling and support through the Child Welfare Committee and a support person. The boy, who was assaulted while protecting her, is also a victim and needs the same care. The first duty is to protect the children, not to manage the headlines.

2. **Stop the second assault: the circulation of the videos —** Every forward of the unblurred video repeats the violation of the girl's dignity, and sharing sexually explicit material involving a child is itself an offence under POCSO and the Information Technology Act. The SP should direct the cyber cell to trace and act against those circulating the videos, request platforms to remove them, and issue a public advisory that sharing them is a crime. He should also remind broadcasters of the legal bar on revealing a child victim's identity. Firm action here protects the girl more than any press conference.

3. **Respect the girl's wishes without letting them defeat the law —** The girl's family's wish to avoid publicity is understandable and must be respected in the manner of investigation, but a sexual offence against a child cannot be closed quietly, because POCSO makes reporting mandatory and the offence is against society. The SP should explain this gently, assure the family of complete confidentiality and a woman officer's handling, and keep them informed. The boy's family's wish for publicity must also be moderated, because publicity about him can easily expose her. The police should speak for both children through facts about arrests and legal action, not through their stories.

4. **Juvenile accused must be dealt with under their own law —** If the arrested persons are minors, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 applies: they must be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board, their identities cannot be disclosed, and a preliminary assessment is required for heinous offences where they are aged 16-18. Parading them before the media or calling them "criminals" in a press conference would violate the law. Due process for the

accused is not softness; it is what ensures that convictions survive. The remaining accused, including the masked man, should be identified through the videos and arrested without delay.

5. **Answer the delay honestly and learn from it —** The police acted only after the video went viral, and saying the victim did not report is true but incomplete. The SP should acknowledge that victims, especially girls, often do not report because they fear blame and social consequences, and that police must create channels that make reporting safer — helplines, women's help desks, and school outreach. Treating virality as the trigger for action sends a dangerous message that only public outrage moves the system.

6. **Confront moral policing as a law-and-order threat —** The attackers acted as self-appointed guardians of morality, and the local leader's comment that children "invite trouble" blames the victims. The SP should publicly state that two students spending time together broke no law and that it is the mob that committed crimes. He can take preventive action against groups known for vigilantism, increase patrolling in isolated spots without restricting young people's freedom of movement, and work with schools on awareness of rights and safety. Policing that protects citizens' liberty, rather than enforcing social prejudice, is the constitutional duty under Articles 14, 19 and 21.

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
Paragraph 15, Election Symbols Order	Paragraph 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission of India to decide disputes between rival sections or groups of a recognised political party, each claiming to be that party, and its decision binds all groups. The Order is issued under Article 324 of the Constitution read with the rules framed under the Representation of the People Act, 1951. The Calcutta High Court today referred to a final determination of the Trinamool Congress dispute under this paragraph.
Article 311 and its proviso	Article 311(1) bars the dismissal or removal of a civil servant by an authority subordinate to the one that appointed him, and Article 311(2) requires an inquiry with a reasonable opportunity of being heard. The second proviso to Article 311(2) dispenses with the inquiry where the person is convicted on a criminal charge, where holding an inquiry is not reasonably practicable, or where the President or Governor is satisfied that it is not expedient in the interest of the security of the State. The Jammu and Kashmir government invoked Article 311 today to terminate a teacher accused in a POCSO case.
Article 20(2) — double jeopardy	Article 20(2) provides that no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once. The protection applies to prosecution and punishment by a court, not to departmental proceedings. The Supreme Court today ordered a fresh probe into a 2012 rape-murder in Karnataka while protecting the lone accused, who was acquitted by a CBI court in 2023.
Article 174(1) — six-month rule	Article 174(1) requires the Governor to summon the State Legislature so that six months do not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the first sitting in the next; Article 85(1) imposes the same rule on Parliament through the President. The provision sets a minimum, not a required number of sitting days. An Indian Express op-ed notes that the two Houses of Parliament met for an average of just 55 days a year during the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024).
Preventive detention and Article 22	Article 22(3) to 22(7) permit preventive detention but require that an Advisory Board review any detention beyond three months and that the detenu be told the grounds and given the earliest opportunity to make a representation. The Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, 1978 is a State preventive detention law. The Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh High Court held on September 17 that preventive detention cannot become a substitute for ordinary criminal law.
Section 447, Companies Act, 2013	Section 447 of the Companies Act, 2013 defines and punishes fraud. Under Section 212(6), a court may take cognisance of a Section 447 offence only on a complaint by the Director of the Serious Fraud Investigation Office or an officer authorised by the Central Government. The Supreme Court today refused to review its January ruling to this effect, while leaving the Centre free to authorise officers. The SFIO is constituted under Section 211 of the Act.
Section 11, Electricity Act, 2003	Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003 allows the appropriate government to direct a generating company, in extraordinary circumstances, to operate and maintain a generating station in accordance with its directions, with the Appropriate Commission able to offset any adverse financial impact. The Power Ministry is considering extending Section 11 directions for Tata Power's 4,000 MW imported coal-based Mundra plant till December amid high demand.
RBI market-risk capital norms	The RBI's final directions on minimum capital requirements for market risk, which come into effect on 1 April 2027, expressly prohibit banks from reclassifying instruments between the trading book and the banking book to lower capital requirements. Market-risk capital must be met on a continuous basis at the close of each business day. These norms are part of India's

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	implementation of the Basel III framework of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision.
RBI tenure limit for private bank chiefs	Under RBI rules for private sector banks, a managing director and CEO or whole-time director cannot hold the post continuously for more than 15 years. The RBI must approve the appointment of such officials under Section 35B of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. The ceiling is in focus today as HDFC Bank seeks a relaxation for one of its candidates for the top post.
NBFC upper layer and listing	Under the RBI's Scale-Based Regulation framework of October 2021, non-banking financial companies are placed in base, middle, upper and top layers according to size and risk. An NBFC classified in the upper layer (NBFC-UL) must list its shares within three years of being so identified. The RBI rejected Tata Sons' deregistration application on September 11, and its classification as NBFC-UL is why the question of listing is now unavoidable.
Index of Core Industries	The Index of Core Industries, compiled by the Office of the Economic Adviser in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, measures output of basic industries including coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity, with iron ore now also reported. Core industries account for 40.27% of the weight of the Index of Industrial Production, which is compiled by the National Statistics Office under MoSPI.
Samudra Manthan Mission	The Samudra Manthan Mission is the government's programme to accelerate oil and gas exploration in India's deep and ultra-deep waters, with an outlay of ₹84,000 crore through FY31 supporting seismic surveys, deepwater drilling and common offshore infrastructure, the government bearing up to half the drilling cost. ONGC's gas discovery at the MN-DW18-1-H-D well about 43 km off Konark in the Mahanadi offshore basin is the first well of its current campaign there. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Rules, 2025 allow shared facilities for such finds.
National Critical Mineral Mission	The National Critical Mineral Mission, approved in January 2025, aims to secure India's supply of critical minerals through exploration, overseas acquisition, processing and recycling, with a government outlay of ₹16,300 crore and expected investment of ₹18,000 crore by public sector undertakings. The Mines Ministry, which today said about ₹34,000 crore has been allocated for critical mineral development, is preparing an incentive scheme for critical mineral recycling. Critical minerals are governed under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.
Access-controlled high-speed corridors	The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued the first separate standards for planning and designing four- and six-lane access-controlled high-speed national highways, which previously had no specific specifications. India plans 50,000 km of such corridors under Viksit Bharat 2047. The revised model concession agreement for highway PPPs requires prior approval of the designated authority for any change in ownership of the concessionaire on national security and public interest grounds.
UNCLOS — transit passage	The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982 gives all ships and aircraft, including warships, a right of "transit passage" through straits used for international navigation, which must be continuous and expeditious and cannot be suspended by the coastal state. It differs from "innocent passage" through the 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, which can be temporarily suspended and does not cover submerged submarines or overflight. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore Cooperative Mechanism of 2007 is offered today as a model for Hormuz.
Leopardus tilcayo	Leopardus tilcayo, called Tilcayo by local communities, is the first new living cat species formally described in more than a century. It belongs to the tiger cats of South America and was found in the Yungas cloud forest of Bolivia; it measures about 46 cm and weighs about 1.4 kg, smaller than a domestic cat, and genetic data confirmed it as a new species. The IUCN Red List treats tiger cats as two Vulnerable species with declining populations.
Project Cheetah	Project Cheetah, launched on 17 September 2022 with cheetahs translocated from Namibia to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, is the world's first intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore; South African cheetahs followed in 2023. The cheetah was declared extinct in

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	India in 1952. A 10-year-old Namibian male, Gaurav, died at Kuno on Monday, and the park now has 51 cheetahs, according to its director.
Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre	The Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka's Northern Province was built with an Indian grant of $12 million; Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid its foundation stone in 2015, and it has an 11-storey building with a 600-seat auditorium. A Trust established on September 18 will run it as an interim governing body until it is handed over to the Jaffna Municipal Council. Thiruvalluvar is the author of the Tamil classic Tirukkural.
SRY gene test in athletics	The Athletics Federation of India will make a once-in-a-lifetime test for the SRY (Sex-determining Region Y) gene mandatory for female athletes of all age groups from 2027 for AFI-approved competitions in the women's section. The SRY gene, located on the Y chromosome, triggers male sex development in the embryo. The AFI is the national federation affiliated to World Athletics.
GDPR lead supervisory authority	Under the EU's General Data Protection Regulation, which applies from 25 May 2018, a company with its main European establishment in one member state is regulated by that state's data protection authority as the lead supervisory authority. Ireland's Data Protection Commission is therefore the lead regulator for many large technology firms, and on Monday it fined Google €403 million over processing of location data. GDPR fines can reach 4% of global annual turnover.

Source note: All items are drawn from The Indian Express, The Hindu & The Economic Times (Delhi Edition) — 22 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 free society is best measured by how it treats the people it suspects.

Themes: Liberty · Rule of law · Ethics

Franz Kafka's novel The Trial begins on an ordinary morning, when a bank clerk called Josef K. is arrested in his own lodgings although he has done nothing wrong. The officers are polite. They are only doing their job. What they cannot tell him, then or ever, is what he is accused of. K. spends the rest of the book trying to defend himself against a charge nobody will name, and the horror of the novel lies less in its violence, which is small, than in its silence. A state can be gentle and still unfree, if it will not tell you why it has laid its hand on you.

Every society suspects people. It must: crime is real, fraud is real, and a state that suspected nobody would protect nobody. So the test of freedom cannot be whether suspicion exists. It is what happens next. Does suspicion have to explain itself before it acts? Can it be checked by someone who does not share it? Does it end when it is proved wrong, or does the suspected person carry it for life? The way a society answers these questions for the people it suspects, who are usually the least popular people in any room, tells us more about its freedom than anything it says about its citizens in general.

Humanity learnt this slowly and at great cost. Clause 39 of Magna Carta, sealed in 1215, promised that no free man would be seized or imprisoned except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. It was a bargain between a king and his barons, not a charter for the poor, but it planted the idea that the power to detain must answer to something outside itself. Five and a half centuries later William Blackstone, in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, put the moral arithmetic plainly: it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer. And in 1943 Justice Felix Frankfurter of the United States Supreme Court, in McNabb v. United States, compressed the whole history into a sentence: "The history of liberty has largely been the history of observance of procedural safeguards."

The Indian Constitution wrote that lesson into its text. Article 22(1) says a person who is arrested shall not be detained without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for the arrest, nor denied the right to consult and be defended by a lawyer of their choice. Article 22(2) requires production before the nearest magistrate within twenty-four hours. These are not ornaments. They exist so that the person who holds the power to detain must, at the very first moment, put the reason where someone else can see it. On 21 September, the Supreme Court held that the grounds must be given in writing, in a language the arrested person understands, and that an arrest which breaks this rule is unconstitutional and entitles the person to immediate release. Such a release, the Bench said, is not bail; it is release from detention that should never have happened. It rejected the argument of investigating agencies that a breach was a "mere procedural lapse", and it applied the rule to ordinary offences and special laws on terrorism and money laundering alike.

It was not always so clear. In A.K. Gopalan's case in 1950, the Court read "procedure established by law" to mean any procedure a legislature enacted, however thin. In ADM Jabalpur in 1976, during the Emergency, a majority held that a detained person could not even approach a court for habeas corpus. Justice H.R. Khanna's lonely dissent cost him the chief justiceship; decades later, in Puttaswamy in 2017, the Court declared the majority view overruled. In between came Maneka Gandhi in 1978, which insisted that any procedure depriving a person of liberty must be just, fair and reasonable, and then D.K. Basu in 1997, which laid down rules for arrest, from the arrest memo to informing a relative. India's journey has been, in Frankfurter's sense, a history of liberty written in procedures.

The principle reaches well beyond the police station. The same day's newspapers reported, in an editorial in The Hindu, that during the special intensive revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal, judicial officers had deemed about 27 lakh of the 60 lakh flagged electors ineligible. More than 22 lakh have appealed. Of the appeals decided so far, nearly 93 per cent have ended with the voter restored to the roll. Whatever the final numbers, the pattern is familiar: a person is first presumed ineligible, and then asked to disprove the presumption. The suspicion arrives without explanation, and the burden of dispelling it falls on the one least equipped to carry it. That is the civic version of Josef K.'s morning.

There is a quieter form of suspicion too, which no court reviews. A task force set up by the Supreme Court on student mental health reported that over 13,600 students from disadvantaged communities dropped out of premier institutions between 2018 and 2023, and spoke of a social mismatch between students and faculty. A student who senses that the room doubts whether they belong is being treated as a suspect of another kind, suspected of not deserving the seat. No warrant is issued. But the effect on the spirit can be the same.

The honest counter-argument deserves its full weight. Terrorists and organised criminals exploit every gap in procedure. A drafting error in an arrest memo can free a dangerous man, and victims rarely feel that the rule of law has served them when that happens. Investigators work under pressure, often without enough staff, and every new requirement adds to their burden. A society that makes suspicion too costly may end up protecting the powerful, who can afford lawyers, more than the weak, who needed the police to act.

But look at what the requirement actually costs. It does not stop an arrest. It asks that the reason be written down, in words the person can read, at the start. If a suspicion is well founded, writing it down costs a sheet of paper. If it cannot be written down, then it was not yet ready to take away a person's liberty. Procedure does not disable suspicion; it disciplines it. It forces the state to convert a feeling into a reason, and a reason into something a magistrate, a lawyer or a family can test. The fear that rules free the guilty is real, but the remedy is better investigation, not blindfolded detention. And in the long run, a police force that must justify each arrest earns the public trust on which every investigation depends.

In the end, the treatment of the suspected is a mirror in which every citizen can see their own future, because anyone can be suspected, and most people will be, of something, at some point. A free society is not one in which nobody is ever wrongly accused. It is one in which being accused does not strip a person of their name, their reasons and their right to answer. Kafka's clerk never got that. The Constitution promises that every Indian will.

Built from today's cards: Supreme Court rules arrest without written grounds is void, makes Magistrate sanction mandatory for any re-arrest · Hindu editorial: SIR appeals show ECI deleted eligible voters first and verified later (Bengal 93% restoration rate) · SC-appointed National Task Force interim report links campus suicides to competition, caste and a student-faculty social mismatch

ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read

What belongs to everyone is cared for by no one.

Themes: Environment · Global commons · Governance

Consider an ordinary day's newspaper. A narrow strait in the Gulf, through which much of the world's oil must pass, is under siege, and a second narrow strait at the mouth of the Red Sea is under attack. A great power admits that it has placed weapons in orbit around the Earth. Indian scientists report that a dangerous fungus in hospital wards now resists most of the medicines we use against it. In Maharashtra, 83 talukas have gone more than twenty days without rain, and tankers are carrying water to villages whose wells have run dry. Five stories, from the sea floor to outer space. They share one feature. Each concerns something that no one owns and everyone uses.

The observation is old. Aristotle, criticising Plato's scheme of common property in the second book of the Politics, wrote that "that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it." Each person, he said, thinks chiefly of his own and hardly at all of the common interest. In 1968 the ecologist Garrett Hardin gave the idea its modern name in an essay in Science, "The Tragedy of the Commons." Imagine, he wrote, a pasture open to all. Each herdsman gains the full benefit of one more animal, while the cost of overgrazing is shared by everyone. So each adds one more, and then another, until the pasture is destroyed. No one intends the ruin. Everyone contributes to it.

The five stories fit the model almost exactly. A strait is a shared highway, and any state that sits beside it can gain by holding it hostage. Earth orbit is a shared shelf, and every debris-creating test or weapon adds a cost that all satellite users will bear; scientists have long warned of cascading collisions that could make some orbits unusable. The effectiveness of antimicrobial drugs is a shared resource too, invisible until it is gone: every unnecessary dose of an antifungal, in a hospital or on a farm, spends a little of it, and the bill falls on a stranger in an ICU years later. Groundwater is the most intimate commons of all. The farmer who digs a deeper borewell gains the water; the neighbour whose well dries up pays. And the atmosphere, into which the rich countries poured most of the historical emissions, has now sent its bill to Nepal in the form of flash floods, which is why Kathmandu has begun speaking not of relief but of climate justice.

If the story ended there, the essay's statement would be a law of nature. It is not. The same newspaper carried a reminder that the tragedy can be averted. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore, which run for about 800 kilometres and carry an enormous share of the world's trade, were once treated as a no-man's sea. In 1971 Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore jointly challenged that view and began working together. After the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea created the regime of transit passage in 1982, the three states built, with the users of the straits, what became the Cooperative Mechanism, launched in 2007. They levy no tolls on ships; they share the burden of safety and the environment with those who use the waterway. A narrow passage that could have become a chokepoint became a shared responsibility.

The larger lesson came from the economist Elinor Ostrom, who in 1990 published Governing the Commons and in 2009 became the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in economics. Ostrom went and looked at real commons: Swiss alpine meadows, Japanese village forests, irrigation systems in Spain and the Philippines. Many had lasted for centuries. They survived not because they were privatised or seized by the state, Hardin's two remedies, but because the users themselves made rules with clear boundaries, watched one another, punished cheating gradually and had cheap ways to settle quarrels. What belongs to everyone, she showed, is cared for when "everyone" stops meaning "no one in particular" and starts meaning "all of us, with rules."

The world has done it at the largest scale too. The Montreal Protocol of 1987 on substances that deplete the ozone layer became the first United Nations treaty to be ratified by every member state, and the ozone layer is on a slow path to recovery. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 declared the exploration and use of outer space to be "the province of all mankind" and barred nuclear weapons from orbit; for half a century it kept the worst of the arms race on the ground.

Closer home, villages in Maharashtra such as Hiware Bazar became known for budgeting their water collectively, deciding together how much to draw and what to grow.

The counter-position must be stated fairly. Cooperation often fails. The cod fishery off Newfoundland, once one of the richest on Earth, collapsed and was closed in 1992 despite scientific warnings. Treaties are only as strong as the willingness of the powerful to obey them; the Outer Space Treaty does not forbid conventional weapons in orbit, and a state that sits beside a strait may decide that the leverage is worth the anger. Ostrom's communities were small, stable and able to see one another. The global commons are none of these things. Perhaps, at the scale of a planet, Aristotle was simply right.

Yet the record suggests a narrower and more hopeful conclusion. Commons fail when three things are missing: knowledge of the damage, a forum where users can bargain, and some cost for cheating. Where these are built, as at Malacca or Montreal, shared things endure. That is why the demands now in the news, for disclosure of weapons in orbit, for wider susceptibility testing of drugs, for village-by-village mapping of groundwater, for a regional fund that treats loss and damage as a shared obligation, all point in the same direction. Each converts an invisible cost into a visible one and gives it an address.

India has particular reasons to take this seriously. It sits beside the Indian Ocean's shipping lanes, it is a spacefaring nation, it carries one of the heaviest burdens of drug-resistant infection and it draws more groundwater than any other country. Its Constitution already asks the state to protect the environment in Article 48A and every citizen to do so in Article 51A(g). The statement in the title is best read not as a verdict but as a warning. What belongs to everyone will be cared for by no one only if everyone waits for someone else. The remedy begins when a people decide that the shared thing is theirs to guard.

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