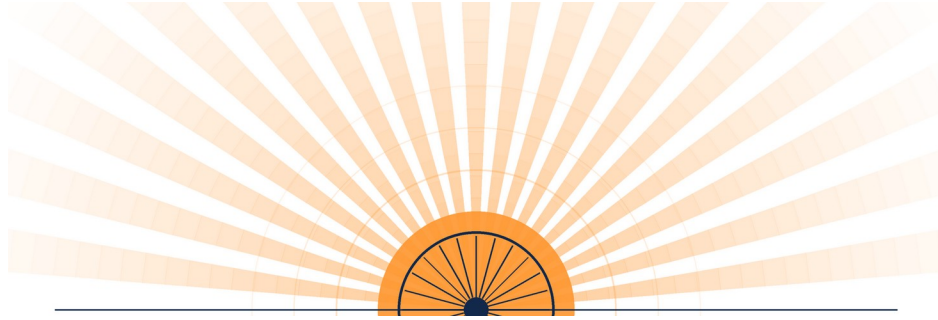




UPSC DARPAN

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 Shataktraya

Your one-stop solution for UPSC CSE examination resources.

Welcome to the Ohana family

Hum jeet ka maja chakh kar rahenge.

Quote of the Day

"Today my Secretary can write a note opposed to my views. I have given that freedom to all my Secretaries... I will never be displeased over a frank expression of opinion."

— Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, speech in the Constituent Assembly (10 October 1949)

The Indian Express & The Hindu (Delhi Edition) — 23 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 · 23 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 धर्म: — 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.

“If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”

— **Justice Robert H. Jackson** · Majority opinion, *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, U.S. Supreme Court (1943)

Use in: Conscience versus the state (today's national song challenge). Use it in essays on liberty, patriotism or secularism, and in GS2/GS4 answers on Articles 19(1)(a) and 25, beside *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986): the state may ask for respect, but it cannot compel a citizen to profess a belief.

“Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realize that our people have yet to learn it.”

— **B.R. Ambedkar** · Speech moving the Draft Constitution, *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 4 November 1948

Use in: Independence of constitutional bodies and collegial decision-making (today's Election Commission story), and the rule that only the legislature can create a crime. Use it to argue that institutions survive on conventions of consultation, dissent and restraint that no text can fully enforce; it fits GS2 answers on the ECI and GS4 answers on probity in public institutions.

“The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.”

— **Albert Einstein** · Telegram on behalf of the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, 24 May 1946 (published in *The New York Times*, 25 May 1946)

Use in: AI and great-power rivalry (today's Xi-Trump AI dialogue). Use it in essays on technology and ethics or in GS3 answers on AI governance: the nuclear age shows that a new power spreads faster than the rules and habits of mind needed to control it, which is the argument for incident channels, verification and a place for the Global South at the table.

Index

Everything in today's edition, card by card.

Front matter

- A Letter from the Editor
- Our Inspiration — Rakesh Verma Sir
- Quotes of the Day

1. Polity & Governance

- 1.1 Supreme Court Says State May Fix Vande Mataram's Stanzas but Cannot Prosecute Conscientious Objectors
- 1.2 Two Election Commissioners Record 14 Objections in 10 Months, Call Form 6 Change 'Unauthorised and Illegal'
- 1.3 Supreme Court Calls U.P. Gangsters Act 'Still-Born', Reaffirming That Only the Legislature Can Create a Crime
- 1.4 Constituent Assembly's 1948 UCC Debate Revisited as Mizoram BJP MLA Breaks With Anti-UCC Resolution
- 1.5 20 MPs Who Left Trinamool for the NCPI Seek Four More Weeks on Disqualification Notices

2. Economy

- 2.1 India-U.S. Trade Deal Stalls Until Washington's Section 301 Probes Re-Tariff India's Competitors
- 2.2 Indian Council of Arbitration Chief Urges India to Write Commercial Arbitration Into New Trade Treaties
- 2.3 Mines Secretary Warns Against 'Squatting' on Mining Blocks as Lithium-Nickel Processing Scheme Nears Launch
- 2.4 Centre Warns States of Ageing, AI and Climate Strains as Mumbai Plans India's Largest Municipal Bond

3. Agriculture & Food

- 3.1 Maharashtra's Women Farmers' Law Recognises Landless Women as Farmers Through a 'Woman Farmer Certificate'
- 3.2 Punjab Draws 152% of Its Extractable Groundwater, and Falling Water Tables Shift Wealth to Large Farmers
- 3.3 Farmers Get 57.8% of the Food Rupee Spent at Home, Only 8.4% When Eating Out

4. International Relations

- 4.1 Trump Tells the UNGA He Must Choose Between an Iran Deal and 'Annihilation'; Hormuz Stays Disrupted
- 4.2 Jaishankar Co-Chairs First P4M Summit, Warns of '4F' Crisis as Tajikistan Contests India's UNSC Bid
- 4.3 Raja Mohan: As Xi and Trump Open an AI Dialogue, India Faces Three Hard Questions
- 4.4 Tharoor Revisits the 1918 Battle of Haifa: Celebrated by India and Israel, Resented by Palestinians

5. Environment & Ecology

- 5.1 Canal-Top Solar Could Add 131 GW Without New Land, but Has Not Scaled Since 2012
- 5.2 Centre Doubles Port Environmental Clearance Validity to 20 Years, With Two Conditional Five-Year Extensions
- 5.3 Rhino Phase I (2026-31) to Expand Range Into Bihar, Arunachal as a Grassland Atlas Is Planned
- 5.4 Rasuwa Disaster Was a Rock-Ice Avalanche, Not a GLOF, and Needs Seismic Warning Networks

6. Health & Life Sciences

- 6.1 Supreme Court Calls Tenfold Markup on Cancer Drug 'Broad Daylight Dacoity', Faults Silent Regulators
- 6.2 CDSCO Circular Warns Against Self-Medication With Antibiotics and Painkillers, Citing Risk of Kidney Damage
- 6.3 Delhi Seizes 481 Counterfeit Abhayrab Rabies Vaccine Units, Traces Supply to Kanpur Agency

7. Science & Technology

- 7.1 AI Data-Centre Boom Drives a Memory-Chip 'Supercycle' While India Stays in Packaging and Design

8. Society

- 8.1 Tamil Nadu Extends Free School Breakfast to Classes 6-8, Taking Coverage to 34.64 Lakh Children
- 8.2 President Murmu Asks Film Stars Not to Endorse Harmful Products, Seeks Social Security for Film Workers

9. Internal Security

- 9.1 IAF's Tarang Shakti-26 Brings Eight Air Forces, Including US F-35s, and 32 Observers to Jodhpur

9.2 Shah Sets December 31, 2029 Deadline to 'Uproot' Drug Trade, Shifting Focus From Seizures to Networks

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

9.1 Case 1 — Six Stanzas and One Silent Officer

9.2 Case 2 — The Award on Tuesday, the Offer on Wednesday

9.3 Case 3 — The Ranger Who Chased the Dumper Alone

10. Prelims Quick-Revision Facts

10 24 one-line facts in exam-pattern form

11. Essays of the Day

11.1 Obedience can be commanded; loyalty has to be earned.

11.2 The hand that feeds is often the last to be fed.

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 this section asks the same question: who has the power to define? The state wants to define the national song, the Election Commission's secretariat is redefining who counts as a new voter, the Uttar Pradesh police defined who was a 'gangster', and the Election Commission and the Speaker are now defining which party a legislator belongs to. In each case the Constitution's answer is the same. Definitions that take away liberty or the vote must come from the legislature, through a process open to challenge, and not from an office memorandum, a software setting or a police chart.

1.1 Supreme Court Says State May Fix Vande Mataram's Stanzas but Cannot Prosecute Conscientious Objectors

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Supreme Court on Tuesday, September 22, asked the Union government to respond to Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna's challenge to the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026. The three-judge Bench was headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and included Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana. According to The Indian Express, the amendment changes Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, so that Vande Mataram gets the same legal protection as the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana. The petition, argued by senior advocate S. Muralidhar, says the amended law, read with Home Ministry directions issued in January and a circular issued in July, forces the playing and mass singing of all six stanzas of Vande Mataram before the National Anthem at public functions. Non-compliance risks three years' jail, a fine or both. The petition calls stanzas three to six "expressly devotional, deity-invoking, and non-secular". It says the scheme offends secularism, a basic feature, and "inflicts expressive subordination on believing Muslims and other conscientious objectors". A conscientious objector is a person who refuses an act on grounds of conscience or faith. Justice Bagchi said the elected state may decide "whether it should be two stanzas or four stanzas", but that "nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 or subject a conscientious objector to penal consequences". He said the 1986 ruling in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* still holds, and that "by custom and usage" the national song has always been understood as Vande Mataram. He added that homage to a particular God may not affect secularism, since the American anthem uses the word 'God'. Mr. Muralidhar argued that the amended Act uses the words "national song" without defining them, that "a penal statute cannot be in the realm of vagueness", and that the Home Ministry's office memorandum was never gazetted and cites no provision of law. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said "Jai Hind is not mentioned in the Constitution" and that "law-making cannot be as per Naxalites' idea". He did not withdraw the remark when Mr. Muralidhar objected, and the Bench said it had "not taken note" of it. The Centre has two weeks to file a counter-affidavit. The Bench's remarks were oral; the only direction reported is the call for a reply. The syllabus link is GS2: fundamental rights, secularism and the limits of penal law.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Vande Mataram becomes a freedom-movement anthem → the Congress in 1937 limits national singing to its first two stanzas, and on January 24, 1950 the Constituent Assembly declares it will be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana → a 2026 amendment extends Section 3 of the 1971 Act to the 'national song', and Home Ministry directions in January and July require all six stanzas → T.M. Krishna challenges this as religious assent compelled under threat of punishment → the Supreme Court restates *Bijoe Emmanuel* orally and gives the Centre two weeks to reply

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- Vande Mataram has constitutional honour but the Constitution does not name it —** Vande Mataram was composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and appears in his novel *Anandamath* (1882). On January 24, 1950, Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Constituent Assembly, declared that Jana Gana Mana would be the National Anthem. He added that Vande Mataram, which had played a historic part in the struggle for freedom, would be honoured equally with it. The text of the Constitution names neither song. Article 51A(a) makes it a fundamental duty to respect the Constitution, the National Flag and the National Anthem, but it does not mention the national song. In 1937 the Congress Working Committee decided that only the first two stanzas would be sung at national gatherings, because the later stanzas invoke Hindu goddesses.
- The 1971 Act punished obstruction of the Anthem, not a refusal to sing it —** Section 2

of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 punishes insults to the National Flag and the Constitution. Section 3 punishes anyone who intentionally prevents the singing of the National Anthem, or disturbs an assembly engaged in singing it, with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both. The offence was built around preventing or disrupting the song, not around a person's own silence. The 2026 amendment extends Section 3 to the national song. The petition reads the amendment together with the Home Ministry directions and argues that simply not complying now carries the same penalty. The reports do not reproduce the amended text, so the Centre's counter-affidavit will show how the government reads its own law.

3. **Bijoe Emmanuel (1986) protects standing in respectful silence** — In *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986), three schoolchildren who were Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled because they did not sing the National Anthem, although they stood respectfully while it was sung. The Supreme Court held that the expulsion violated their freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a), which includes the right to remain silent, and their freedom of conscience and religion under Article 25. It found that no law required anyone to sing the Anthem, and that departmental circulars were not 'law' that could restrict a fundamental right under Article 19(2). The judgment closes with the line: "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our Constitution practises tolerance; let us not dilute it." In *Shyam Narayan Chouksey v. Union of India* the Court ordered the Anthem to be played in cinema halls in 2016, then made it optional in 2018.
4. **Only a valid law can restrict a fundamental right, and a penal law must be precise** — Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, health and the other fundamental rights. Article 26 gives religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion. Article 28(3) says that no one attending an educational institution recognised or aided by the State can be required to take part in religious worship there without consent. In *Kharak Singh v. State of U.P.* (1962), the Court held that executive instructions are not 'law' that can justify restricting a fundamental right. In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015), it struck down Section 66A of the IT Act partly because terms such as "grossly offensive" were too vague to warn citizens what was forbidden. Secularism was held to be part of the basic structure in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994).

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 and GS1 keep returning to the Indian model of secularism** — Mains has repeatedly asked how Indian secularism differs from the Western model, and what challenges cultural practices face in its name. This case tests both at once. The state claims a cultural symbol, the petitioner says the symbol is religious, and the Bench points to the American anthem as an example of 'positive secularism'. An answer that sets *Bijoe Emmanuel* against this idea of positive secularism will stand out.
2. **Prelims tests national symbols, fundamental duties and the 1971 Act** — Questions have asked which symbols Article 51A names, who wrote the national song and the National Anthem, and what the 1971 Act punishes. This amendment adds a new fact to that set: the statutory status of the national song. The *Bijoe Emmanuel* facts are a standard Prelims pairing with Articles 19(1)(a) and 25.
3. **GS4 uses conscience and tolerance as case material** — The ethics paper asks about conscience as a source of ethical guidance and about tolerance in public life. A civil servant who must enforce patriotic observances in a mixed classroom or office is exactly the kind of case study GS4 favours, and *Bijoe Emmanuel* supplies the principle to apply.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Article 51A(a) makes it a fundamental duty to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem; the national song is not named in it.
- Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 punishes intentionally preventing the singing of the National Anthem, or disturbing an assembly engaged in singing it, with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine, or both.
- Vande Mataram was composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and forms part of his novel Anandamath (1882).
- On January 24, 1950, the President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, declared that Vande Mataram would be honoured equally with the National Anthem, Jana Gana Mana.
- In *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986), the Supreme Court held that expelling students who stood respectfully but did not sing the National Anthem violated Articles 19(1)(a) and 25.
- Under Article 28(3), no person attending an educational institution recognised by or receiving aid from the State can be required to take part in religious instruction or worship there without his consent or, for a minor, the guardian's consent.
- Article 26 gives every religious denomination the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, to manage its own affairs in matters of religion, and to own and administer property in accordance with law.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The Bench has put the line in the right place: the state may choose the symbol but not the citizen's voice** — Justice Bagchi separated two powers that the petition treats as one. The first is the power to decide what the national song is, which the Bench leaves to the elected government. The second is the power to force a person to sing it, which the Bench says is not available under the *Bijoe Emmanuel* rule. This is a sound division. Courts are poorly placed to decide national aspirations, but they are well placed to protect individual conscience. The counter-view comes from the petition itself. It argues that the harm lies not only in the penalty but in the state adopting openly devotional stanzas as its own, which it calls "expressive subordination". On that view, removing the penalty still leaves a state ceremony that some citizens cannot join as equals.
- 2. The American analogy is weaker than it sounds** — The Bench pointed to the American national anthem's use of the word 'God' as an example of positive secularism. A generic reference to God is not the same as stanzas that the petition says invoke particular deities of one faith. The American example also cuts the other way. In *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943), the U.S. Supreme Court held that schoolchildren could not be compelled to salute the flag. The American settlement is therefore symbolic religiosity with no compulsion. That supports the Bench's refusal to allow penal consequences, but it does not show that the content of the stanzas is constitutionally irrelevant.
- 3. Vagueness, not secularism, is the petition's strongest legal ground** — A secularism argument asks the Court to rule on the religious character of a revered text, which it will be reluctant to do. The vagueness argument is narrower and harder to answer. A penal law that punishes conduct relating to a "national song" without defining it leaves the offence to be filled in by an ungazetted office memorandum, so a citizen cannot know from the statute what is required. Justice Bagchi's reply that "custom and usage" identifies the song answers which song is meant, but not how much of it. As Mr. Muralidhar put it, custom points to two stanzas, not six. The same principle, that the legislature must define a crime, is at the centre of the *Gangsters Act* ruling in this

	section. 4. Oral assurances do not yet protect anyone — Everything the Bench said about conscientious objectors was said orally. The reports mention no interim order protecting people who stay silent, only the call for a counter-affidavit in two weeks. A teacher, a student or an employee who stays seated during a six-stanza rendition still faces a statute and executive directions that have not been stayed. Courtroom remarks carry weight with governments, but they do not bind a police station. The counter-affidavit may narrow the dispute: if the Centre says the law punishes only obstruction, as the original Section 3 did, much of the conflict disappears. If it defends punishing non-participation, Bijoe Emmanuel will be tested directly. 5. The Solicitor-General's remark cost the government more than it gained — Calling an argument made in a constitutional court the idea of 'Naxalites' treats a legal objection as if it were an insurgency. A law officer is entitled to argue hard, and the Bench wisely declined to take note of the remark, keeping the hearing on the legal issue. But the hearing was being streamed live, as Mr. Muralidhar pointed out, and the words will outlast the arguments. The government's strongest point, that national symbols need not be neutral and that 'Jai Hind' is used without any constitutional basis, got lost in the exchange. When advocacy of this kind comes from the state, it discourages citizens from bringing the challenges that constitutional adjudication depends on.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The State may decide what the national song is, but it cannot compel a citizen to sing it." Examine this proposition in the light of the Bijoe Emmanuel judgment and the constitutional limits on penal legislation. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the September 22 hearing on T.M. Krishna's challenge to the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026 and Justice Bagchi's distinction between defining the song and penalising those who object to it. 2. Body — the power to define — Explain the status of Vande Mataram: the 1950 declaration, its absence from Article 51A, the 1937 two-stanza decision, and the Bench's view that the choice of stanzas belongs to the elected state. Mention the government's argument that national symbols need not be religiously neutral. 3. Body — the limit on compulsion — Set out Bijoe Emmanuel: silence as speech under Article 19(1)(a), conscience under Article 25, circulars are not law. Add Article 28(3), Kharak Singh on executive instructions, and West Virginia v. Barnette as a comparative example. 4. Body — penal law must be certain — Use the vagueness argument: an undefined 'national song', an ungazetted office memorandum, and Shreya Singhal on vague penal terms. Note that the original Section 3 punished obstruction, not silence. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that respect for national symbols is best secured through consent and tradition, and that criminal law should be reserved for obstruction and disruption, not for a citizen's silence.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a District Magistrate at a public function. Some teachers and students remain silently standing during the six-stanza rendition of Vande Mataram, and a local group demands their arrest. What do you do? Approach: I would keep order at the venue and make sure nobody is harassed. The law as declared in Bijoe Emmanuel protects respectful silence, and the Supreme Court restated it on September 22. I would tell the group that disrupting the ceremony is itself an offence, whereas standing in silence is not obstruction. Afterwards I would ask the State law department for written guidance so that officers across the district act consistently until the Supreme Court decides the case.

Q2. As a Station House Officer, you receive a written complaint under the amended Section 3 against a person who did not sing the national song. Would you register a case?

Approach: I would first check whether the complaint alleges that the person prevented the singing or disturbed the assembly, which is what Section 3 has always punished. If it alleges only silence, I would record it, take legal advice from the public prosecutor, and point out that the Supreme Court has said orally that conscientious objectors cannot face penal consequences. Arresting someone on a doubtful reading of a law that is under challenge would expose both the citizen and the police to injustice. Where a complaint discloses a cognizable offence, I cannot simply refuse to act, so careful documentation matters.

Q3. An interview board asks: is compelling respect for national symbols a legitimate way to build patriotism?

Approach: Respect for national symbols is valuable because it expresses a shared commitment, and the state may promote it through education and ceremony. Compulsion defeats that purpose, because a respect extracted under threat of jail is not respect. Bijoe Emmanuel recognised that our Constitution practises tolerance, and history shows that symbols chosen by consensus, like the two-stanza settlement of 1937, have endured. I would support promotion and protection against disruption, but not criminal penalties for silence.

1.2 Two Election Commissioners Record 14 Objections in 10 Months, Call Form 6 Change ‘Unauthorised and Illegal’

THE NEWS New Delhi. Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected in writing at least 14 times over 10 months, four times on a single day, to decisions and orders they say were issued in the Commission's name without their knowledge. So reports the first part of an Indian Express investigation. Five notes were copied to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. The first note, on October 28, 2025, said orders were going out without Commission approval. On April 16, 2026, Mr. Sandhu wrote he learnt of new IT modules “from media only”. Mr. Joshi recorded the same day that for over a year he had received no agenda or minutes of Commission meetings. On July 28, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Maneesh Garg changed the allocation of work and removed Deputy Election Commissioner Sanjay Kumar's oversight of the IT division. On July 29 both wrote separately to Cabinet Secretary T.V. Somanathan calling this a “clear violation” of the law, and on July 30 jointly set the order aside. Since July, Form 6, the form a new voter fills, has asked whether the applicant, a parent or a grandparent “exist” in the roll of the last Special Intensive Revision (SIR), held in the early 2000s. The question is not marked mandatory, but the form cannot be submitted without it. On May 16, Mr. Joshi wrote that Form 6 is prescribed under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 and “cannot be altered” without amending those Rules; Mr. Sandhu agreed on May 19. On August 13, Mr. Sandhu called the change “unauthorised and illegal”, and the question was still on the form on Monday morning. On August 14 he wrote that IT Director General Seema Khanna “doesn't have any legal authority” to restrict access for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), the statutory officers who prepare each roll. In Goa, 97 voters found eligible by EROs were left off the final roll because the software could not reverse earlier deletions. The first full meeting of all three in four months came on September 9. The Commission and both Commissioners did not respond. Separately, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday that notices sent to over 33 lakh Delhi voters for “logical discrepancies” (mismatches the software finds when linking a voter to relatives on an older roll) look “machine-generated”. It sought a status report from the Commission. The syllabus link is GS2: constitutional bodies and electoral law.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Article 324 creates a Commission, and since 1993 it has been a multi-member body whose members have equal votes → the 2023 Act requires business to be transacted unanimously as far as possible and procedure to be settled only unanimously → the SIR from June 2025 and ECINet from January 22, 2026 move roll decisions into software controlled from Delhi → two Commissioners record 14 objections, write to the Cabinet Secretary and strike down a work-allocation order → the rift becomes public as the Supreme Court questions machine-generated SIR notices in Delhi

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 324 gives electoral power to a Commission, not to its Chairperson alone —** Article 324(1) gives the Election Commission the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, the State legislatures, and the offices of President and Vice-President. Article 324(2) provides for a Chief Election Commissioner and as many other Election Commissioners as the President may fix. Under Article 324(5), the CEC can be removed only in the manner and on the grounds of a Supreme Court judge, and an Election Commissioner only on the CEC's recommendation. The Commission was briefly multi-member in 1989–90 and has been so continuously since 1993. In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld this design and held that the CEC and the Election Commissioners are equal, with differences settled by majority.
- 2. The 2023 Act fixes both who appoints and how the Commission decides —** The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 followed *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023). In that case, a Constitution Bench had put the Chief Justice of India on the selection committee until Parliament made a law. The Act instead provides a selection committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party), and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. A search committee headed by the Law Minister prepares a panel of five names. Section 18 says all business shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously, and otherwise by majority. The Commission may settle its procedure and the division of its work only by unanimous decision.
- 3. Electoral rolls are prepared by a decentralised statutory process —** Under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, every Assembly constituency has an Electoral Registration Officer (Section 13B), usually the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, who prepares and revises the roll. A person is entitled to be registered if they are 18 on the qualifying date and ordinarily resident in the constituency (Section 19). A person is disqualified only if they are not a citizen, have been declared of unsound mind by a court, or are barred under election law (Section 16). Section 21 provides for preparing and revising rolls, and Section 21(3) allows a special revision at any time for reasons to be recorded. The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 are made by the Central Government after consulting the Commission (Section 28). These Rules prescribe Form 6 for inclusion, Form 7 for objection or deletion, and Form 8 for correction or shifting.
- 4. The Commission's plenary power works within the law, not above it —** In *Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner* (1978), the Supreme Court described Article 324 as a reservoir of power for situations the law does not cover, to be used fairly. In *A.C. Jose v. Sivan Pillai* (1984), it held that the Commission cannot issue directions contrary to statute. That case set aside an election conducted with electronic voting machines that no law yet authorised, which is why Section 61A was added to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 in 1988. In *Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer* (1995), the Court held that names already on the roll cannot be deleted merely on suspicion, without notice and a hearing. The Election Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 allowed Aadhaar to be collected voluntarily, and the Rules and Form 6 were amended by government notification to give effect to it.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS2 names constitutional bodies and their appointments directly —** The syllabus asks about appointment to constitutional posts and the powers and functions of constitutional bodies. Questions on the Election Commission have asked about its independence, the mode of appointment and removal, and its role in free and fair elections. The 2023 Act and *Anoop Baranwal* are now the minimum background; this story adds how the Commission functions internally, which is fresher ground.
- 2. The SIR has made electoral rolls a live topic for Prelims and Mains —** Prelims has asked about the composition of the Commission, removal of Election Commissioners

and the Representation of the People Acts. The SIR adds questions on Section 21(3), the ERO's role, and the forms under the 1960 Rules. In Mains, a question on the right to vote and exclusion from rolls is likely, and the Form 6 change is a precise example of delegated legislation being bypassed.

- 3. E-governance questions now include algorithmic decision-making** — GS2 includes e-governance, transparency and accountability. ECINet and the Delhi 'machine-generated' notices show how software can quietly move statutory power from an officer to an IT division. Answers on digital governance can use this as an example of why audit trails and human override matter.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Under Article 324(5), the Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only in the manner and on the grounds of a Supreme Court judge, while an Election Commissioner can be removed only on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- In *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court upheld the multi-member Election Commission and held that the CEC and Election Commissioners are equal, with decisions by majority where they differ.
- Under the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, the selection committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of the largest opposition party) and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Section 18 of the 2023 Act provides that the Commission's business shall as far as possible be transacted unanimously, otherwise by majority, and that its procedure and division of work shall be settled by unanimous decision.
- Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 allows the Election Commission to order a special revision of the electoral roll at any time, for reasons to be recorded.
- The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 are framed by the Central Government after consulting the Election Commission; Form 6 is for inclusion, Form 7 for objection or deletion, and Form 8 for correction or shifting of entries.
- Article 326 provides for elections on the basis of adult suffrage; the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act, 1988 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The charge is not dissent but exclusion, and exclusion is more serious** — In 2009 CEC N. Gopalaswami recommended that Navin Chawla be removed, and in 2019 Ashok Lavasa wanted his dissent recorded in the orders. Both were individuals disagreeing with a decision. Here, two members who together form a majority say decisions were taken without them at all. Section 18 requires business to be transacted by the Commission, and requires the division of work to be unanimous. So an order changing work allocation without the full Commission, if the account is accurate, lacked authority rather than merely being a decision they disagreed with. The counter-view is that no three-member body can approve every letter, and the secretariat must act under delegation. That is a fair point, but it only moves the question: was the delegation itself approved unanimously, as the Act requires?
- 2. The Form 6 change is a textbook case of bypassing delegated legislation** — Form 6 sits in the 1960 Rules, which the Central Government frames after consulting the Commission. The 2022 Aadhaar change shows the lawful route: Parliament amended the Act and the Legislative Department notified new Rules. A.C. Jose had already held that the Commission cannot act contrary to statute simply because Article 324 is broad. The substance matters too. Entitlement to vote depends on age, citizenship and

ordinary residence, not on whether one's parents survived the last revision. A question that is 'not mandatory' but blocks submission is mandatory in practice. The Commission may argue that it is only collecting information to verify rolls, but a form fixed by law cannot be changed by a software update.

3. **Central software quietly moves statutory power to people the law never named —** In law, the ERO decides every name. In practice, according to the notes, what the ERO can do depends on permissions set by the IT division in Delhi. Goa is the clearest example. Officers found 97 voters eligible after hearings ordered by the Supreme Court, and the software could not record their decision. The Delhi notices, which the Bench called "machine-generated", show the same problem from the other side: an algorithm raises suspicion and the citizen has to disprove it. The honest counter-view is that central control helps remove duplicates, secures the data and prevents local manipulation. The answer is not to decentralise the code but to audit it, which is what Mr. Joshi proposed in May with an outside IIT expert.
4. **This is one newspaper's reading of internal files, and fairness requires saying so —** The Indian Express says it has seen the notes and interviewed officials. The Commission and both Commissioners did not respond to its questionnaire and calls, so the CEC's reasons are not on record. There may be explanations the paper did not receive, such as urgency under SIR timelines or delegations approved earlier. It also matters that all three Commissioners were appointed by the same government, so this is not a split along party lines, which makes the account harder to dismiss as political. The remedy is disclosure. The Commission could publish its work allocation orders and the minutes of its meetings, which would settle the factual dispute either way.
5. **Writing to the Cabinet Secretary shows how weak the internal remedies are —** Two constitutional functionaries writing to the country's senior-most civil servant about their own secretariat is without precedent, as the paper notes. It shows that the Commission has no internal mechanism for its members to enforce Section 18 against the CEC or senior officers. Yet the Commission's independence, stressed in Anoop Baranwal, is independence from the executive, and inviting the executive into internal disputes is uncomfortable. A better design would be rules of business, adopted under Section 18, that require every order issued in the Commission's name to carry a record of approval. Such rules would be open to scrutiny by courts and Parliament.
6. **The courts are already filling the gap the Commission has left —** In West Bengal, according to the Express, the Supreme Court handed the last stage of the SIR to judicial officers in February 2026, and tribunals of retired High Court judges now hear appeals. Of the 38 lakh pending appeals, 16.10 lakh seek to delete voters those officers had included, and Mr. Sandhu asked who authorised them. The SIR, begun in Bihar in June 2025, has struck more than 13 crore names off draft rolls in 30 States and Union Territories, per the Express. In Delhi, the Bench asked for filters and standard replies for the "15-20 types" of queries, Justice Mohana noted that BLOs are often unavailable, and the Commission assured the Court that no name would be deleted and that its October 29 deadline could be extended. An op-ed by Nikhil Dey and Koninika Ray in the same paper reports that in 95 houses in Mangolpuri one spouse had been marked as having shifted. The counter-view is that courts cannot manage rolls for a country of voters. That is true, and it is exactly why the Commission's own collegial checks need to work.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

The Election Commission's authority rests on its being a collegial, multi-member constitutional body that acts within the law. In the light of objections recently recorded by two Election Commissioners, examine the safeguards for the Commission's internal functioning and for the integrity of electoral rolls, and suggest reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — State that the Express investigation reports 14 written objections in 10 months by Election Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi, which touch on the process for new voters, the custody of the roll and appeals, and that the Commission did not respond.
- 2. Body — the collegial design** — Explain Article 324, the multi-member Commission, T.N. Seshan (1995), the 2023 Act's selection committee and Section 18 on unanimity and majority. Contrast the Chawla (2009) and Lavasa (2019) episodes with the present claim of exclusion.
- 3. Body — the rule of law in rolls** — Discuss the Form 6 change against the 1960 Rules and Section 28, A.C. Jose (1984) on acting contrary to statute, and the 2022 Aadhaar amendment as the lawful route. Explain the ERO's statutory role and the ECINet access problem, with Goa's 97 voters and Delhi's machine-generated notices.
- 4. Body — reforms** — Suggest rules of business under Section 18 with recorded approvals, publication of minutes and work allocations, an independent audit of ECINet access with logs, statutory override powers for EROs, public hearings before deletions, and a rule that statutory forms are changed only by notification.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that the Commission's credibility depends less on its powers than on visible collegiality and legality, and that transparency is the quickest way to answer the allegations, whether they are true or not.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are an Electoral Registration Officer. After a hearing you find a voter eligible, but the software does not allow you to record your decision before the final roll is published. What do you do?

Approach: My decision is a statutory one, so I would record it in writing in the case file with reasons, the date and the documents relied on. I would immediately inform the District Election Officer and the Chief Electoral Officer in writing, asking for the rollback option, as Goa's CEO did. If the roll is published without the name, I would support the voter's claim or appeal with my own record. A software limitation cannot cancel a decision the law requires me to make.

Q2. As a State's Chief Electoral Officer, you receive a direction in the Commission's name that you suspect was never approved by the Commission. How do you handle it?

Approach: I would not ignore it, because that would create confusion in the field. I would comply with any part that is plainly within law, and seek written confirmation from the Commission's secretariat that the direction has the Commission's approval, citing Section 18 of the 2023 Act. If the direction affects voters' rights, such as deletions or appeals, I would ask for clarification before acting. Keeping a written record protects both the voters and the office.

Q3. An interview board asks: should disagreements inside the Election Commission be made public?

Approach: The Commission's decisions affect every voter, so its reasoning should be as open as possible. Publishing dissent in every order could politicise routine matters, which was the argument in 2019. A balanced rule would be to publish minutes and the vote on major policy decisions such as the design of revisions, forms and access to rolls, while leaving routine administration internal. Transparency is ultimately the Commission's best defence against allegations of bias.

1.3 Supreme Court Calls U.P. Gangsters Act ‘Still-Born’, Reaffirming That Only the Legislature Can Create a Crime

THE NEWS New Delhi. In an article in The Hindu on September 23, B.B. Pande, a former Professor of Law at Delhi University, examines a Supreme Court ruling of August 20. Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran, in *Shiv Pratap Singh vs. State of U.P.* and *Himanshu Srivastava vs. State of U.P.*, held that “the U.P. Act is still-born and the proceedings under it cannot survive”. The Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986 had been used against gangsters for four decades. The Court reasoned that under the Act, a ‘gangster’ is defined and the decision on who is a gangster, for the purpose of punishment, is “left to the ipse dixit of the Executive” through the Rules. Ipse dixit means a bare assertion made without proof. The Court said: “The creation of a crime, or to make an act or omission subject to penal consequences as an offence, is essentially a legislative function and it cannot be thrown away and left to sprout in the thicket of subordinate legislation.” According to the article, Section 23 of the Act makes special provisions for trial, bail and rule-making, and a set procedure is used to prepare a police ‘gang chart’, the document that names a person as a member of a gang. The Court observed that when status is fixed by administrative and police authorities through a gang chart, “nothing remains to be considered by the judicial officer but to punish him”, so the trial is “a foregone conclusion, a statutory imprimatur to punish”. It relied on the definition of “offence” in the General Clauses Act and on Article 20(1), concluding: “We cannot find any offence having been created.” Professor Pande links it to the maxims *nullum crimen sine lege* (no crime without law) and *nulla poena sine lege* (no punishment without law). He cites Herbert L. Packer’s *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction* (1968), which says defining crime belongs “primarily and broadly to the legislature, secondarily and interstitially to the courts, and to no one else”. According to Supreme Court Observer, the Court quashed the proceedings under Sections 2 and 3 of the Act in both appeals, found that the gang chart under the 2021 Rules gave the executive “unbridled” power, and said it was not deciding the Act’s constitutional validity, which it left open. The syllabus link is GS2 (fundamental rights, judiciary) and GS3 (organised crime).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Gang violence in Uttar Pradesh in the 1980s → the 1986 Act defines ‘gang’ and ‘gangster’ and prescribes punishment, while status is fixed through a police gang chart → repeated complaints that executive authorities decide culpability without verifiable evidence → on August 20, 2026 the Supreme Court finds that no offence was ever created, calls the Act ‘still-born’ and quashes the proceedings → action against organised crime must now rest on laws that define the crime itself

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 20(1) turns the principle of legality into a fundamental right** — Article 20(1) says no person shall be convicted of an offence except for violating a law in force when the act was committed, nor given a penalty greater than that law then prescribed. Article 20(2) bars prosecuting and punishing a person for the same offence more than once. Article 20(3) protects an accused from being compelled to be a witness against himself. After the 44th Amendment (1978), Article 359 does not allow the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 to be suspended even during a national emergency. Together these make Article 20 among the most protected guarantees in Part III.
- 2. An ‘offence’ must be an act or omission that a law makes punishable** — Section 3(38) of the General Clauses Act, 1897 defines “offence” as any act or omission made punishable by any law for the time being in force. The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 used the same definition, and it is carried into the *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita*, 2023. The definition is centred on conduct, not identity: the law must describe what a person does that is forbidden. A statute that defines a type of person and prescribes punishment, without describing a prohibited act, fails this test. That is the core of the August 20 ruling.
- 3. The legislature cannot hand its essential functions to the executive** — In *In re Delhi Laws Act* (1951), the Supreme Court held that the legislature may delegate the making of detailed rules, but not its essential legislative function of laying down policy. Rules made under an Act must stay within the parent Act, and a rule that goes beyond it is *ultra vires* and void. Creating a crime and fixing its punishment is the clearest example of an essential function. A rule can set out procedure, but it cannot supply an offence that the Act itself does not create.

	4. Other organised-crime laws define an offence and not just a status — The Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999 defines ‘continuing unlawful activity’ with reference to earlier chargesheets and defines organised crime as a specific activity. Section 111 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 now makes organised crime a nationwide offence, and Section 112 covers petty organised crime. Each describes conduct, such as continuing unlawful activity by a syndicate, rather than punishing a person for being labelled a gangster. This contrast shows the State that organised crime can be punished through a properly drafted offence.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Prelims regularly tests Article 20 and emergency protections — Prelims has asked which fundamental rights cannot be suspended during an emergency and what protections Article 20 contains. The August 20 ruling gives these provisions a vivid current example. It also connects to the General Clauses Act definition of ‘offence’, which is a less familiar but examinable fact. 2. GS2 and GS3 meet on rights and organised crime — GS2 covers fundamental rights and the judiciary, while GS3 covers organised crime and internal security. Mains questions on special laws, such as UAPA, AFSPA or State organised-crime Acts, ask candidates to balance security against liberty. This ruling supplies a principled test for that balance: define the crime, and let a court decide guilt. 3. Delegated legislation is a recurring theme in Polity answers — Questions on parliamentary control over delegated legislation and the role of committees on subordinate legislation come up often. The ruling is a clear illustration of the limits of delegation, and the same principle appears in today’s national song and Form 6 stories.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Article 20(1) prohibits conviction for an act that was not an offence under a law in force when it was committed, and a penalty greater than the one that law then prescribed. - Article 20(2) prohibits prosecuting and punishing a person for the same offence more than once, and Article 20(3) protects an accused from being compelled to be a witness against himself. - After the 44th Constitutional Amendment (1978), the enforcement of Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended under Article 359 even during a national emergency. - Section 3(38) of the General Clauses Act, 1897 defines “offence” as any act or omission made punishable by any law for the time being in force. - Section 111 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 defines and punishes organised crime, and Section 112 deals with petty organised crime. - In <i>In re Delhi Laws Act</i> (1951), the Supreme Court held that the legislature cannot delegate its essential legislative function of laying down policy. - The Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act was enacted in 1986.
ANALYSIS	1. The ruling is narrow in form but wide in effect — The Bench did not strike down the Act as unconstitutional; according to Supreme Court Observer, it expressly left that question open. But if the Act creates no offence, every prosecution under its Sections 2 and 3 faces the same objection. The ruling therefore works almost like a declaration of invalidity without being one. The State can argue that the Act, read with its list of anti-social activities, incorporates offences that already exist. The Bench rejected that argument, and the undecided constitutional question means a larger Bench could still revisit the matter. The practical course is new legislation, not litigation. 2. Punishing status is an old danger in a new form — Punishing people for who they are,

rather than for what they have done, has a history in India. The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 branded whole communities as criminal and was repealed only in 1952. A gang chart that fixes a person's identity as a 'gangster', followed by a trial whose result is "a foregone conclusion", repeats that logic in a smaller form. Professor Pande's warning about 'name-calling' at will, with words like deshdrohi and 'urban naxal', makes the same point about public labels. The counter-view deserves respect. Witness intimidation and repeat violence can defeat the ordinary law, and the State needs special tools. The answer is that Section 111 of the BNS now provides such a tool, with an offence defined by its elements.

3. Letting police and the District Magistrate decide status merges prosecutor and judge

— According to Supreme Court Observer, the gang chart under the 2021 Rules is prepared by the police and approved at a joint meeting of police and the District Magistrate. That means the executive both accuses and, in effect, decides the most important fact in the case. Article 50 asks the State to separate the judiciary from the executive in public services, and the ruling applies that principle to criminal procedure. When status is settled before trial, the judge is left only to confirm it, which the Bench called "a statutory imprimatur to punish". A fair system lets the executive investigate and accuse, and leaves findings of fact to a court.

4. Duplicate punishment was the hidden cost of the Act

— According to Supreme Court Observer, the anti-social activities listed in the Act were already offences under the IPC and other laws. A person could therefore be tried for the underlying crime and again under the Gangsters Act for the same conduct. This comes close to the concern behind Article 20(2), although the Bench did not rest its decision on double jeopardy. Combined with strict bail conditions, the Act made the legal process itself a punishment. Once the special law is removed, organised-crime cases rely on the underlying offences, which have to be proved with evidence.

5. The same principle runs through today's other polity stories

— The national song case asks whether an undefined term and an ungazetted office memorandum can carry a penalty. The Form 6 dispute asks whether a statutory form can be changed without amending the Rules. The Gangsters Act ruling answers the underlying question most clearly: the power to restrict liberty must come from a law passed by the legislature. Rules and administrative orders can carry that law out, but they cannot replace it. For an aspirant, this common principle is more useful than any single case, because it applies across GS2.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

"The creation of a crime is essentially a legislative function." In the light of the Supreme Court's ruling on the U.P. Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986, discuss the principle of legality in Indian criminal law and its implications for special laws against organised crime. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Introduce the August 20, 2026 ruling of Justices Pardiwala and Vinod Chandran calling the U.P. Act "still-born" because it defines a status and prescribes punishment without creating an offence.
- 2. Body — the principle of legality** — Explain nullum crimen sine lege and nulla poena sine lege, Article 20(1), its non-suspendability under Article 359, and the General Clauses Act definition of 'offence'. Quote Packer's point that defining crime belongs to the legislature and to no one else.
- 3. Body — limits of delegation and executive power** — Discuss In re Delhi Laws Act on essential legislative functions, the gang chart as executive ipse dixit, the trial becoming a foregone conclusion, and the risk of double punishment.
- 4. Body — implications for special laws** — Contrast status-based laws with offence-

based laws such as MCOCA and Section 111 of the BNS. Note that constitutional validity was left open, that other charges continue, and that the State needs to legislate afresh. Present the security counter-view and answer it.

- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that firm action against organised crime is compatible with the rule of law only when the legislature defines the crime and a court decides guilt on evidence.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Superintendent of Police in a U.P. district with dozens of pending Gangsters Act cases. What do you do after the ruling?

Approach: I would get legal advice through the prosecution directorate on which proceedings under Sections 2 and 3 are affected, and not resist quashing where the ruling clearly applies. For each accused, I would make sure the underlying offences under the IPC, BNS or special laws are properly investigated and charged, because those survive. Where there is evidence of a continuing syndicate, I would examine whether Section 111 of the BNS applies. The aim is to keep dangerous offenders accountable through lawful charges, not to find new ways to label them.

Q2. As a District Magistrate, you have been approving gang charts at joint meetings with the police. How do you see your role now?

Approach: The ruling tells me that my signature was being treated as a finding of guilt, which is a court's job. I would stop approving any status-based chart that leads to punishment, and restrict my role to reviewing preventive measures that have a clear statutory basis. I would insist that every recommendation from the police records the evidence relied on. Protecting the district from gangs is part of my duty, but so is making sure that executive power is not used to punish.

Q3. An interview board asks: don't tough laws like this help control crime in States where witnesses are afraid to testify?

Approach: Witness intimidation is real, and the State needs strong tools such as witness protection, speedy trials and organised-crime offences with clear elements. A law that punishes a label rather than an act, however, catches the wrongly listed along with the guilty, and it weakens public trust in policing. The Supreme Court has not stopped the State from fighting gangs. It has asked the State to define the crime. Strong laws and fair laws are not opposites; a well-defined offence is both.

1.4 Constituent Assembly's 1948 UCC Debate Revisited as Mizoram BJP MLA Breaks With Anti-UCC Resolution

THE NEWS New Delhi and Guwahati. The Indian Express on Wednesday revisited the Constituent Assembly's debate of November 23, 1948 on what was then draft Article 35 and is now Article 44 of the Constitution. Article 44 says: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India." It is one of the Directive Principles of State Policy, which guide the State but cannot be enforced in court. A uniform civil code (UCC) means one law on marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption for all citizens, replacing religious personal laws. Against it, Mohammad Ismail Khan (Muslim League, United Provinces) saw no need "to compel people to give up their personal law", and B. Pocker of Madras called interference "really tyrannous". Naziruddin Ahmad of West Bengal cited a clash with draft Article 19 (freedom of conscience) and said what the British in 175 years "failed to do or was afraid to do" should not be done at once. Syed Hussain Imam of Bihar said a secular State is "not irreligious but non-religious", and uniform laws should wait for literacy and economic progress. For the provision, K.M. Munshi of Bombay said it was not a "tyranny of the majority". He said advanced Muslim countries had not treated minority personal law as "so sacrosanct as to prevent the enactment of a Civil Code", and that the House had already accepted that religious practices in the field of social reform could be regulated. "We want to divorce religion from personal law," he said, adding that a common code would raise women's status. B.R. Ambedkar replied that India already had a uniform Criminal Code, and that marriage and succession were the "little corner" civil law had "not been able to invade so far". He suggested a future Parliament could make adherence

“purely voluntary”. In Mizoram, The Hindu reports that K. Hrahmo, one of the BJP’s two MLAs and the member for Palak in Siaha district, called for a closer look at the UCC in Aizawl on Monday, breaking with the State government. The 40-member Assembly resolved in February 2023 to oppose any UCC, and Chief Minister Lalduhoma recently called it a threat to indigenous customary laws and minority rights. Mr. Hrahmo argued a UCC could better protect Mizo women married to non-tribal men, and said tribal populations are excluded where UCCs exist. The syllabus link is GS1 and GS2.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Colonial codes cover crime and procedure but leave marriage and succession to personal law → on November 23, 1948 the Constituent Assembly places the UCC among the non-justiciable Directive Principles as draft Article 35 → Parliament reforms Hindu law in 1955–56 and offers the optional Special Marriage Act, 1954, while other personal laws remain largely uncoded → Mizoram’s Assembly resolves against any UCC in February 2023 and Uttarakhand enacts a UCC in 2024 that exempts Scheduled Tribes → a Mizoram BJP MLA argues a UCC could protect Mizo women married to non-tribal men

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Article 44 is a Directive Principle, and that placement was deliberate** — Part IV of the Constitution (Articles 36 to 51) contains the Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 37 says they are not enforceable by any court but are fundamental in the governance of the country, and the State must apply them in making laws. Article 44 asks the State to “endeavour to secure” a uniform civil code, which is language of aspiration rather than command. Goa is the one part of India with a long-standing common civil law. It kept the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867 after it joined India in 1961. Uttarakhand enacted the Uniform Civil Code of Uttarakhand, 2024, which came into force in January 2025 and exempts Scheduled Tribes.
- 2. Article 25 protects religion but lets the State reform social practice** — Draft Article 19, which Naziruddin Ahmad relied on, became Article 25. It guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, health and the other fundamental rights. Article 25(2)(a) allows the State to regulate economic, financial, political or other secular activity associated with religious practice. Article 25(2)(b) allows laws for social welfare and reform. This is the “social reform” exception Munshi referred to, and it is the constitutional basis for the Hindu Code laws of 1955–56: the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act.
- 3. Article 371G gives Mizoram’s Assembly a veto over Parliament on customary law** — Article 371G was inserted by the 53rd Amendment (1986) before Mizoram became a State in 1987. It provides that no Act of Parliament on the religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, the administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, or the ownership and transfer of land applies to Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly decides so by resolution. Article 371A gives Nagaland a similar protection. So a national UCC could not extend to these subjects in Mizoram without the Assembly’s consent. Parts of Mizoram also have autonomous district councils under the Sixth Schedule.
- 4. The courts and the Law Commission have pulled in different directions** — In Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum (1985), the Supreme Court regretted that Article 44 had remained a dead letter. In Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India (1995), dealing with Hindu men converting to Islam to marry again, it again urged the government to act on Article 44. The 21st Law Commission, in a 2018 consultation paper on family law reform, said a UCC was “neither necessary nor desirable at this stage” and suggested reforming each personal law to remove discrimination. The 22nd Law Commission invited public views on the UCC in June 2023. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 already offers a secular civil marriage open to anyone, regardless of religion.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. Mains has asked why India has not enacted a UCC** — GS2 has asked candidates to discuss the factors that stop India from enacting a uniform civil code under the

	Directive Principles. The Constituent Assembly debate provides the original arguments on both sides, and the Mizoram story adds a dimension most answers leave out: tribal customary law and the special provisions of Article 371. 2. Prelims tests Part IV and the special provisions — Questions have asked which Directive Principles are Gandhian, liberal or socialist, whether Directive Principles are justiciable, and which States have special provisions under Articles 371 to 371J. Article 371G's protection for Mizo customary law and Goa's civil code are well-suited to statement-based questions. 3. GS1 links the UCC to women and secularism — GS1 covers the role of women, social empowerment and secularism. Munshi's argument about the status of women and Imam's distinction between 'non-religious' and 'irreligious' are useful ways into answers on Indian secularism and gender justice in personal law.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Article 44, in Part IV of the Constitution, directs the State to endeavour to secure a uniform civil code for citizens throughout the territory of India. ● Under Article 37, the Directive Principles of State Policy are not enforceable by any court but are fundamental in the governance of the country. ● Article 25(2)(b) permits the State to make laws providing for social welfare and reform, notwithstanding the freedom of religion. ● Under Article 371G, no Act of Parliament on the religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, or ownership and transfer of land applies to Mizoram unless its Legislative Assembly so decides by resolution. ● Article 371G was inserted by the 53rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1986. ● Goa continues to follow a common civil law derived from the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867. ● The Special Marriage Act, 1954 provides for civil marriage between any two persons irrespective of their religion.
ANALYSIS	1. The 1948 debate was mostly about timing, not about principle — Read closely, many opponents did not reject uniformity forever. Syed Hussain Imam wanted to wait for literacy and economic progress, and Naziruddin Ahmad objected to doing it "all at once". Ambedkar himself offered a voluntary route. The Assembly responded by choosing the words "endeavour to secure" and placing the provision among the non-justiciable principles, which was a decision about sequence. The counter-view is that 75 years of waiting has itself become a choice, and women governed by unreformed personal laws have paid for it. Both sides can claim the founders' support, which is why the debate never settles. 2. Ambedkar's 'voluntary' suggestion is the most neglected idea in the debate — A voluntary code is not hypothetical, because the Special Marriage Act, 1954 is already a secular option that anyone may choose. Expanding it into a full optional code on succession, adoption and divorce would let citizens opt in without the State overriding anyone's faith. It would also test demand honestly. The counter-view is serious: those who most need protection, usually women in unequal households, are the least able to insist on opting in. A voluntary code helps the educated and the independent first, so it is at best a first step, not a substitute for reform. 3. Mr. Hrahmo's two claims pull against each other — The MLA argues that a UCC would protect Mizo women married to non-tribal men. He also says tribal populations are excluded from UCCs where they have been implemented, which is true of Uttarakhand's law. If a Mizoram UCC followed that model, it would exempt the Mizo women it is meant to protect. If it did not, Article 371G would require the Assembly's consent, and the Assembly has resolved against it. His argument is really about

	customary rules on mixed marriages, inheritance and land, which can be reformed through Mizo customary law and State legislation. The report does not specify what protection he has in mind, but the gender concern he raises is real and should not be dismissed as partisan. 4. A uniform law is not automatically an equal law — Munshi's case tied uniformity to women's uplift, but these are different goals. A single code could still be unequal if it adopted one community's rules, and several personal laws could each be made gender-just through separate reforms, which is the route the 21st Law Commission preferred. Dr. Ambedkar's comparison with the uniform criminal code is instructive, because criminal law was made uniform by a colonial legislature, not by consensus. The counter-view is that piecemeal reform is slow and uneven, and a common baseline of rights on divorce, maintenance and inheritance would end forum-shopping between laws. The honest position is that equality should be the test and uniformity the tool. 5. Imam's 'non-religious' state is still the key concept in today's arguments — Syed Hussain Imam distinguished a State that is irreligious, meaning hostile to religion, from one that is non-religious, meaning it does not take sides. Indian secularism has since developed as 'principled distance': the State may intervene in religion to reform it, as Article 25(2)(b) allows, but must do so even-handedly. The UCC debate and today's national song case both turn on this idea. The question in each is whether the State is reforming for equality or imposing one tradition's norms. A UCC that is visibly even-handed, and that treats tribal and minority concerns as constitutional rather than political, will be far easier to defend.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Constituent Assembly placed the uniform civil code among the Directive Principles as a matter of sequence rather than principle." Critically examine this statement with reference to the Assembly debate of November 23, 1948 and the constitutional position of tribal customary law. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Quote Article 44 and state that it was debated as draft Article 35 on November 23, 1948 and placed among the non-justiciable Directive Principles. 2. Body — the arguments in 1948 — Summarise the opponents (Ismail Khan, Pocker, Naziruddin Ahmad, Baig, Imam) and the supporters (Munshi on majority tyranny, social reform, secularism and women; Ambedkar on the uniform criminal code, the 'little corner' and the voluntary route). Show that several objections were about timing. 3. Body — sequence in practice — Trace the Hindu Code laws of 1955–56, the Special Marriage Act, 1954, Goa's civil code, Shah Bano and Sarla Mudgal, the 2018 Law Commission paper, and Uttarakhand's 2024 code with its Scheduled Tribe exemption. 4. Body — tribal customary law — Explain Article 371G and Mizoram's 2023 resolution, the Chief Minister's position and MLA Hrahmo's argument about Mizo women married to non-tribal men, and the tension between legal pluralism and gender justice. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the Constitution chose persuasion and sequence over compulsion, and that the path forward lies in gender-just reform with consent, including through voluntary and State-level routes.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Chief Secretary of a north-eastern State with Article 371 protections. The Centre asks for your State's views on a national UCC. What would your note say? Approach: I would set out the constitutional position first: our Assembly's consent is required for any central law on customary practices and land, and the Assembly's current resolution opposes a UCC. I would separate the concerns of tribal identity and land, which are protected, from gender-justice concerns within customary law, which

deserve attention. I would recommend consultation with village councils, churches and women's groups, and suggest that any reform the State takes up be tailored to its customary institutions. The note would present options, not a political conclusion.

Q2. As a Deputy Commissioner, you learn that a Mizo woman married to a non-tribal man is being denied a share in family property under customary practice. What can you do?

Approach: I would first ensure she has free legal aid through the District Legal Services Authority and a clear account of her rights under current State law and customary law. Where customary bodies decide the matter, I would ask for a hearing that follows due process, and I would record any violation of statutory rights. I would also send the case to the State government as evidence for policy reform. My role is to secure fair process and access to justice, not to override the customary system on my own.

Q3. An interview board asks: is a uniform civil code necessary for national integration?

Approach: National integration comes from equal citizenship and trust, and India has stayed united while allowing diverse personal laws, as the special provisions for Nagaland and Mizoram show. Where a UCC is justified, it is as a tool for gender equality and legal certainty, not as a test of loyalty. Forcing uniformity on unwilling communities could weaken integration rather than strengthen it. I would favour gender-just reform built on consultation, with a well-designed optional civil code as a meeting point.

1.5 20 MPs Who Left Trinamool for the NCPI Seek Four More Weeks on Disqualification Notices

THE NEWS New Delhi. Twenty Lok Sabha MPs who quit the Trinamool Congress and aligned themselves with the NCPI have asked for four more weeks to respond to notices issued by Speaker Om Birla. The notices were issued on petitions seeking their disqualification under the anti-defection law, The Hindu reports. The deadline the MPs had been given expired on Tuesday, September 22. NCPI parliamentary chairperson Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar said the MPs had not yet collected the documents needed for the response. The report does not say who filed the petitions, whether the extension was granted, or how the NCPI relates to the Trinamool's factions. The anti-defection law is the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, under which a legislator who voluntarily gives up membership of their party, or defies its whip in a vote, can lose their seat. The Speaker decides such petitions for the Lok Sabha. The notices come amid a split in the Trinamool. In an editorial titled 'Freezing democracy', The Hindu notes that on September 17, 2026, the Election Commission of India froze the All India Trinamool Congress's name and its 'grass and flowers' symbol, almost 28 years after Mamata Banerjee founded the party. The Commission's 14-page order said that because two rival groups, one led by Ms. Banerjee and the other by Arup Roy, both claim to be the party, the matter requires "substantive determination". Until then neither group can use the name or symbol, and both have been given new names and symbols. A separate report in the paper on the Rajya Sabha bypoll refers to Ms. Banerjee's party as the "Mamata All India Trinamool Congress". The editorial notes that 41% of voters, more than 2.60 crore, voted for Ms. Banerjee's party in the April 2026 West Bengal Assembly election, with a margin of about 32 lakh votes separating it from the BJP. It records that opposition parties have called similar freezes, as in the case of the Shiv Sena, "party theft". The editorial goes on to argue that the Commission is "acting in tandem with the interests of the BJP". That is the newspaper's opinion; the Commission's stated reason is the need to determine the dispute on its merits. The syllabus link is GS2: Parliament, the anti-defection law and the Election Commission.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The 'Aaya Ram Gaya Ram' defections of the late 1960s → the Tenth Schedule under the 52nd Amendment (1985) makes the presiding officer the judge of defection → the 91st Amendment (2003) removes the 'split' exception and leaves only a two-thirds merger → the Trinamool Congress splits, and the ECI freezes its name and symbol on September 17, 2026 → 20 MPs aligned with the NCPI face disqualification petitions before Speaker Om Birla and seek four more weeks

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Tenth Schedule punishes leaving a party and defying its whip** — The 52nd Amendment Act, 1985 added the Tenth Schedule. Under Paragraph 2(1)(a), a member

elected on a party ticket is disqualified if they voluntarily give up membership of that party. Under Paragraph 2(1)(b), they are disqualified if they vote or abstain contrary to the party's direction without permission, unless the party condones it within 15 days. An independent member who joins a party after election is disqualified, and so is a nominated member who joins a party more than six months after taking their seat. In *Ravi S. Naik v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that giving up membership voluntarily need not be formal and can be inferred from a member's conduct.

2. **After 2003, only a two-thirds merger protects a group** — Paragraph 3 originally protected a 'split' supported by one-third of a legislature party. The 91st Amendment Act, 2003 deleted it. Paragraph 4 now protects members only when their original political party merges with another party, and such a merger is deemed to have taken place only if at least two-thirds of the members of the legislature party agree. The same amendment capped the size of the Council of Ministers at 15% of the strength of the House, and barred disqualified defectors from holding ministerial office until re-elected. In *Subhash Desai v. Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra* (2023), a Constitution Bench held that the political party, not the legislature party alone, appoints the whip, and that a split is no longer a defence.
3. **The Speaker decides, subject to limited judicial review** — Paragraph 6 makes the Speaker or Chairman the authority to decide questions of disqualification, and Paragraph 8 lets them make rules. For the Lok Sabha these are the Members of Lok Sabha (Disqualification on Ground of Defection) Rules, 1985. In *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the Schedule. It held that the Speaker acts as a tribunal whose decisions are open to judicial review on limited grounds, and struck down Paragraph 7, which had barred the courts. The minority opinion held that making the Speaker the sole arbiter was itself unconstitutional because of the Speaker's political position. In *Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur* (2020), the Court said petitions should ordinarily be decided within three months, and suggested that Parliament consider an independent tribunal.
4. **Disputes over a party's name and symbol go to the Election Commission, not the Speaker** — Paragraph 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission to decide which of the rival groups of a recognised party is that party. In *Sadiq Ali v. Election Commission of India* (1971), the Supreme Court upheld this power and the Commission's use of majority tests. Freezing the name and symbol until the dispute is decided is an established interim step; the Commission used it for the Shiv Sena in 2022. In *Subhash Desai* (2023), the Court held that disqualification proceedings pending before the Speaker do not bar the Commission from deciding a Paragraph 15 dispute. It also cautioned that a majority in the legislature may not always be the right test. The two forums therefore run in parallel.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Anti-defection law is a perennial GS2 question** — Mains has repeatedly asked whether the Tenth Schedule has achieved its purpose, whether the presiding officer should decide disqualification, and how delay undermines the law. This case adds a group of 20 MPs, a frozen party name and a request for more time, which touches all three issues.
2. **Prelims tests the amendments and the case law** — Questions have asked which amendment added the Tenth Schedule, who decides disqualification, what the 91st Amendment changed, and whether the presiding officer's decision can be reviewed by courts. *Kihoto Hollohan* and the two-thirds merger rule are standard material.
3. **The overlap between the Speaker and the Election Commission is a new angle** — The Shiv Sena and NCP disputes showed that defection cases now run before two forums

	at once. An answer that explains how the Speaker's finding and the Commission's Paragraph 15 decision can diverge, and why that matters, will stand out from the standard answers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) was added to the Constitution by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985. ● Under Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule, questions of disqualification of a member are decided by the Speaker or Chairman of the House. ● The 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 deleted the 'split' exception in Paragraph 3 of the Tenth Schedule and capped the Council of Ministers at 15% of the strength of the House. ● Under Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule, a merger protects members from disqualification only if at least two-thirds of the members of the legislature party have agreed to it. ● In <i>Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu</i> (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the Tenth Schedule but held that the presiding officer's decision is subject to judicial review. ● In <i>Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur</i> (2020), the Supreme Court said disqualification petitions should ordinarily be decided within three months. ● Paragraph 15 of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 empowers the Election Commission to decide disputes between rival groups of a recognised political party.
ANALYSIS	1. In defection cases, time matters more than documents — A member facing disqualification keeps voting, drawing allowances and building a new party while the petition is pending, so every extension works in their favour. The anti-defection law's record shows that delay is the most common way it is defeated. That is why the Supreme Court in <i>Keisham</i> suggested three months as the ordinary limit. The counter-view is legitimate: natural justice requires a fair opportunity, twenty separate members may need individual replies, and the facts about party identity are complicated when the party's own name is frozen. The test for the Speaker is whether the extension is needed to decide the case fairly or only postpones it. 2. The freeze makes the question 'which party did they leave?' harder — The Tenth Schedule measures defection against the party that set the member up as a candidate. With the Trinamool's name frozen and two groups claiming it, the MPs' defence may depend on how the Commission settles the Paragraph 15 dispute. The papers do not say how the NCPI relates to either faction, so this reasoning is conditional. Subhash Desai holds that the two forums run in parallel, but in practice each may wait for the other, which suits anyone who benefits from delay. The counter-view is that, according to <i>The Hindu</i>, the MPs 'quit' the Trinamool and aligned with another outfit, and under Ravi S. Naik conduct of that kind can itself show that they voluntarily gave up membership. 3. Since 2003, a group departure is either a merger or a disqualification — Before 2003, one-third of a legislature party could claim a split. Now, 20 MPs can escape disqualification only by showing that their original party merged with another and that two-thirds of the legislature party agreed. The papers do not give the numbers needed to judge that here. The 2003 reform was meant to end group defections, but experience has shown that mergers can be arranged instead. The counter-view has force too: the Tenth Schedule leaves members no lawful way to exit a party whose leadership they reject, so some reformers, following the Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms (1990), would limit disqualification for defying the whip to votes

	of confidence and no-confidence. 4. The flaw is that the judge belongs to a political party, and the alternatives have the same flaw — The Speaker is elected on a party ticket and decides cases that change the strength of parties in the House. The minority opinion in Kihoto Hollohan saw this as a fatal defect. Keisham suggested an independent tribunal, and the Dinesh Goswami Committee proposed that the President or Governor decide on the Election Commission's advice. But this section's other story shows the difficulty. The Commission is itself accused of partisanship in the same Bengal dispute, and two of its own members have recorded that decisions were taken without them. Moving the decision to another body does not create neutrality. A time limit written into the law and full judicial review may achieve more than a change of judge. 5. The editorial's charge needs the Commission's answer, but the pattern it describes is real — The Hindu's editorial says the Commission is acting in the BJP's interest; that is a strong opinion, not a finding. The Commission's order gives a standard reason under Paragraph 15: rival claims need substantive determination, and freezing the symbol in the meantime keeps either group from gaining an advantage. It used the same step for the Shiv Sena in 2022. The pattern the editorial points to, however, is real. In recent years the Commission has recognised the group with the legislative majority as the party, as in the Shiv Sena and NCP cases, which gives defectors in the legislature a route to take over a party. Subhash Desai cautioned against relying only on legislative majority. How the Commission applies that caution here will show whether the editorial's fear is justified.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The Tenth Schedule has moved the contest over defection from the floor of the House to the Speaker's office and the Election Commission." Critically examine this statement in the light of recent developments, and suggest reforms to the anti-defection law. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the 20 Lok Sabha MPs who left the Trinamool for the NCPI seeking four more weeks to answer Speaker Om Birla's disqualification notices, and the Commission's September 17 freeze of the Trinamool's name and symbol. 2. Body — the Speaker's role — Explain Paragraphs 2, 4 and 6, the 91st Amendment, Kihoto Hollohan (majority and minority opinions), and Keisham's three-month guideline. Show how delay and extensions weaken the law. 3. Body — the Election Commission's role — Explain Paragraph 15 of the Symbols Order, Sadiq Ali, the practice of freezing symbols, and Subhash Desai on parallel proceedings and the limits of the legislative-majority test. Show how the two forums can reach different results on party identity. 4. Body — reforms — Discuss a statutory time limit, an independent tribunal or decision by the President or Governor on the Commission's advice (Dinesh Goswami Committee), limiting the whip to confidence and money votes, and inner-party democracy. Note the counter-view that any adjudicator can be accused of bias. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the law's purpose, stable mandates, is best served by quick and reviewable decisions, and that reform must speed up adjudication rather than simply change who decides.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha, and the Speaker asks whether to grant the 20 MPs four more weeks. What do you advise? Approach: I would point out that the rules allow further time for sufficient cause, and that fairness requires a real opportunity to reply, especially for twenty members. I would also point out the Supreme Court's view in Keisham that petitions should

ordinarily be decided within three months, so any extension should be short, reasoned and recorded. I would suggest a firm schedule for hearings after the replies, so that the extension does not become open-ended. A written, reasoned order protects the Speaker's decision if it is challenged in court.

Q2. As an officer in the Election Commission handling the Trinamool's Paragraph 15 dispute, how would you ensure the process is seen as fair?

Approach: I would make sure both groups get the same opportunity to file documents, have equal hearing time, and receive each other's submissions. I would examine the party constitution, organisational membership and legislative strength, in line with the Supreme Court's caution against relying on the legislative majority alone. I would set out a clear timeline and publish reasoned orders at each stage. Given the public allegations of bias, the process has to be visibly fair as well as actually fair.

Q3. An interview board asks: has the anti-defection law done more harm than good?

Approach: It has reduced the open buying of individual legislators that was common in the 1960s, which was its main purpose. But it has also silenced legislators within their parties and shifted defections to groups and engineered mergers, with Speakers often delaying decisions. I would keep the law but limit the whip to votes of confidence and money matters, require decisions within a fixed time, and allow full judicial review. That would protect the voter's mandate without turning legislators into mere agents of party leaders.

2. Economy

Today's economy stories are about the rules that decide where capital goes and how safe it is once it gets there. Washington now sets tariffs through investigations that India cannot influence, so New Delhi is waiting rather than signing. An arbitration chief argues that India's treaties should promise investors a working dispute system at home. The Mines Ministry is fighting speculators who sit on mining land, while the Centre warns States that ageing, AI and climate risk will strain their budgets just as Mumbai prepares to borrow from the bond market. In each case the real test is whether the institutions hold up, not what the announcement says.

2.1 India–U.S. Trade Deal Stalls Until Washington's Section 301 Probes Re-Tariff India's Competitors

THE NEWS Washington DC. India and the U.S. are unlikely to sign a trade deal until Washington launches and concludes fresh 'Section 301 investigations' and tariffs India's competitors such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, a person familiar with the process told The Hindu. A deal is thus "highly unlikely" around Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's U.S. visit for the G-20 trade ministerial starting September 30. Section 301 of American trade law lets Washington investigate a foreign country's practices and impose tariffs if it finds them unfair; it is using these probes to get around the U.S. Supreme Court's February 2026 ruling that President Donald Trump's 'reciprocal' tariffs were an unlawful use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Before that ruling, an India–U.S. joint statement of February 6 had announced an interim agreement setting an 18% general tariff on Indian goods, an edge over Pakistan (19%), politically the most sensitive for New Delhi, Vietnam (20%), Sri Lanka (20%), Bangladesh (19%) and the Philippines (19%). Nepal and the Maldives, which paid 10% outside that schedule, now trade on a most-favoured-nation (MFN) basis, the normal duty charged to all WTO members. The problem lies in two sets of 301 probes launched in March 2026. Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines face forced-labour probes but were left off the 'excess capacity' list, on which India figures. Pakistan pays 10% under the forced-labour probe, and there is no legal tool at present to raise these countries' tariffs back to their earlier levels. India, by contrast, is likely to face 8% under the excess-capacity probe, which would take its overall tariff back up to 18%. The person called Pakistan's omission from that list a "strategic mistake". Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal had said at the Global Fintech Fest 2026 that India operates largely on an MFN basis and the U.S. on executive tariffs, so a deal needs "differentials" and preferential access for India. On Friday, September 18, Mr. Trump signed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, which lets the U.S. executive impose tariffs of up to 100% on the top five importers of Russian oil, including India and China. Sanctions can be suspended in the U.S. national interest, and with midterms on November 3 the administration is watching petrol prices. India is the third-largest crude importer and second-biggest buyer of Russian crude. The syllabus link is GS2 (effect of developed countries' policies on India) and GS3 (trade).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

U.S. Supreme Court rules in February 2026 that the IEEPA 'reciprocal' tariffs were unlawful → the 18% rate India had agreed on February 6, and its small edge over rivals, loses its legal basis → Washington rebuilds tariffs country by country through Section 301 probes launched in March 2026 → India gets the 'excess capacity' probe (likely 8%, back to 18% overall) while Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines get forced-labour probes (Pakistan at 10%) → signing now would lock India in at a disadvantage, so New Delhi waits for fresh 301s on its competitors

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Section 301 lets the U.S. executive punish 'unfair' trade practices without Congress voting on tariffs** — Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 empowers the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to investigate a foreign country's acts, policies or practices that it finds unjustifiable, unreasonable or discriminatory and that burden U.S. commerce. If the finding is adverse, the USTR can impose duties, restrict imports or withdraw trade concessions. The best-known use was against China from 2018, when tariffs were placed on a large share of Chinese imports. In 2020 the USTR also opened Section 301 investigations into digital services taxes, including India's equalisation levy. A WTO panel in 2020 found the U.S. tariffs on China inconsistent with WTO rules, which shows that Section 301 is a unilateral tool that sits uneasily with multilateral law.
- 2. IEEPA is a sanctions law, which is why tariffs built on it were open to legal challenge** — The International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 1977, allows the U.S. President,

	after declaring a national emergency over an unusual and extraordinary threat from outside the country, to regulate or block international economic transactions. It has mainly been used for sanctions, such as freezing assets. Under Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, the power to lay duties belongs to Congress, so a President can impose tariffs only when a statute delegates that power. The February 2026 ruling reported by The Hindu held that the 'reciprocal' tariffs were an unlawful use of IEEPA. Other statutes, such as Section 301 and Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 (the national-security provision used for steel and aluminium tariffs in 2018), remain available to the executive. 3. Most-favoured-nation treatment is the WTO's rule of equal tariffs for all members — Article I of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) obliges every WTO member to extend any tariff advantage it gives one member to all others. Each member also records 'bound' tariffs, which are ceilings it has promised not to exceed, and its 'applied' tariffs can be lower. The main exceptions are free trade areas and customs unions under Article XXIV, special treatment for developing countries under the 1979 Enabling Clause (the basis of the Generalised System of Preferences), and the security exceptions of Article XXI. The U.S. withdrew India's Generalised System of Preferences benefits in June 2019. When Mr. Agrawal says India trades on an MFN basis, he means its tariffs are legislated and bound, not changed by executive order from week to week. 4. The WTO's appeal court has been shut since 2019, so unilateral tariffs face little legal check — The WTO's Dispute Settlement Understanding provides for panels and an appeal stage before a standing Appellate Body of seven members. The Appellate Body stopped working in December 2019 because the U.S. blocked new appointments, leaving it without the minimum three members needed to hear an appeal. A losing party can now appeal a panel report 'into the void', so the report never becomes binding. Some members created the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement as a stopgap, but India is not part of it. This is why countries now bargain bilaterally with the U.S. instead of litigating.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks directly about the effect of developed countries' policies on India — The GS2 syllabus lists the "effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests". The 2018 GS2 paper asked what reforms the WTO needs to survive in the context of a 'trade war', keeping India's interests in mind. Section 301 probes, the IEEPA ruling and the Graham Act are the updated evidence for any such question. 2. Prelims tests WTO principles and trade vocabulary, not tariff rates — UPSC has repeatedly asked about WTO agreements, the MFN principle and preferential schemes such as the Generalised System of Preferences. A question on what Section 301 or IEEPA empowers, or on the status of the Appellate Body, fits that pattern well. Today's 18% or 19% rates will not be asked; the provisions behind them may be. 3. GS3 links trade policy to jobs in labour-intensive exports — India's main competitors named in the report are Vietnam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, which compete with India in labour-intensive goods such as garments. A Mains answer on export competitiveness or employment in manufacturing should explain that the relative tariff, not the absolute one, decides where orders go.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 authorises the Office of the United States Trade Representative to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices considered unjustifiable, unreasonable or discriminatory. ● The International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 1977, of the U.S. allows the President to regulate international economic transactions after declaring a

national emergency over an external threat.

- The most-favoured-nation obligation of the WTO is contained in Article I of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
- Section 232 of the U.S. Trade Expansion Act of 1962 permits import restrictions on national-security grounds and was the basis for the 2018 U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium.
- The WTO Appellate Body has seven members and has been unable to hear appeals since December 2019 because new appointments were blocked.
- The Enabling Clause of 1979 is the WTO's legal basis for preferential tariff treatment of developing countries, including the Generalised System of Preferences.
- India is not a party to the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement set up by some WTO members as a stopgap appeal mechanism.

ANALYSIS

- 1. India is bargaining for a margin over its rivals, not a low tariff** — A U.S. buyer of shirts compares the landed price of Indian, Bangladeshi and Vietnamese goods, so what matters is the gap between their tariffs. Under the February 6 deal India's edge was one or two percentage points, small but decisive in low-margin goods. If Pakistan sits at 10% while India goes back to 18%, the edge becomes a penalty. Waiting for fresh 301s on competitors is therefore rational from New Delhi's side. The counter-view is that waiting has its own cost: exporters and factories plan capacity on predictability, and months of uncertainty may push orders away regardless of the final rate.
- 2. The timetable is now set by U.S. procedure, not by Indian negotiators** — A 301 investigation involves notice, public comment and hearings before a determination, and the report says even the subjects of the new probes have not been decided. With midterm elections on November 3, domestic U.S. politics will shape both the pace and the targets. India has no seat in that process. This means a Goyal visit on September 30 cannot close the deal, and a realistic horizon is months, not weeks. India's best use of the interval is to secure its preferential structure in the text, so that the margin survives whatever tools Washington uses later.
- 3. Mr. Agrawal's MFN point exposes an asymmetry in any deal India signs** — India's tariffs are set by law and bound at the WTO, so a cut India offers is durable. U.S. tariffs are now set by executive action through probes, which can be changed by another probe or another court ruling. A deal between the two is therefore a permanent Indian concession against a revocable American one. India should seek snapback clauses or commitments that the preferential margin will be restored if U.S. tariffs change. The U.S. counter is that India's own applied tariffs have been raised through budgets in recent years, so India is not as rule-bound as it claims.
- 4. Hoping Washington tariffs Pakistan is sound trade logic but an uncomfortable foreign policy** — The source's phrase "strategic mistake" shows that India's gain now depends on the U.S. raising costs for its neighbours. This is beggar-thy-neighbour trade policy in reverse: India benefits from others being penalised rather than from its own productivity. It also ties Indian trade policy to American decisions about Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, countries India courts in its Neighbourhood First policy. The more durable route to competitiveness is lower logistics costs and better factory scale, which no tariff schedule can give.
- 5. The Graham Act is a heavy threat whose use is limited by oil prices** — Tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil would be crippling if applied. But the law lets sanctions be suspended in the U.S. national interest, and the report notes the administration's concern about petrol prices before the midterms. Because India is the third-largest crude importer, any forced switch away from Russian oil would push up

	global prices, which hurts American voters too. India's size as a buyer therefore gives it some leverage. The counter-view is that leverage cuts both ways: the threat alone can raise risk premiums for Indian exporters and refiners even if it is never used.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Unilateral trade instruments have replaced negotiated tariffs as the main lever of United States trade policy." In light of the stalled India-U.S. trade agreement and the use of Section 301 investigations, examine the implications for India's export competitiveness and suggest how India should protect its interests. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the February 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the IEEPA 'reciprocal' tariffs were unlawful, and the shift to Section 301 probes launched in March 2026. State that India's February 6 interim deal gave it an 18% rate against 19-20% for its rivals. 2. Body — how the instruments work — Explain Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 and the role of the USTR, contrast it with the MFN principle of GATT Article I, and note that the WTO Appellate Body has been non-functional since 2019. Show why India faces the 'excess capacity' probe (likely 8%, back to 18%) while Pakistan pays 10% under the forced-labour probe. 3. Body — impact on competitiveness — Argue that relative tariffs decide orders in labour-intensive sectors competing with Bangladesh, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. Add the Graham Act threat of up to 100% tariffs on top Russian-oil importers and the limits on its use. 4. Body — India's options — Suggest preferential margins written into the deal with snapback clauses, market diversification through FTAs, lower logistics and compliance costs at home, and continued support for WTO appellate reform. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that tariffs set by probe can be undone by probe, so India should seek durable margins in the text and build competitiveness that does not depend on others being penalised.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Joint Secretary negotiating with the U.S. The Minister wants a deal announced during the September 30 visit. What do you advise? Approach: I would advise against signing a text that fixes India at 18% while rivals pay less under different probes, because that would give away our margin permanently. Instead the visit can be used to agree on the architecture of preferential differentials and a timeline linked to the U.S. investigations. A joint statement on principles can show progress without locking in a disadvantage. I would brief exporters' councils so that markets do not read the delay as failure. Q2. As District Collector of a garment-export cluster, orders are slowing because U.S. buyers are uncertain. What can you do? Approach: I cannot change tariffs, but I can reduce costs that are within the district's control, such as delays in approvals, power supply problems and inland transport bottlenecks. I would convene the District Export Promotion Committee to identify units at risk and connect them with export credit and diversification support through export promotion councils. I would also track employment in the cluster so that any lay-offs are known early and workers can be linked to skilling and social security schemes. Q3. An interview board asks: is it right for India to want the U.S. to tariff Pakistan and Sri Lanka? Approach: In trade negotiations every country seeks a margin over its competitors, so wanting parity of treatment is legitimate. But a policy whose success depends on neighbours being penalised is fragile and can damage relations with countries like Sri

Lanka and Bangladesh that India wants close. The better aim is non-discrimination against India, not discrimination against others. Long-term, competitiveness must come from productivity, which is under India's control.

2.2 Indian Council of Arbitration Chief Urges India to Write Commercial Arbitration Into New Trade Treaties

THE NEWS New Delhi. India's recent trade and investment treaties should be written so that they strengthen commercial arbitration at home, argues Arun Chawla, Director General of the Indian Council of Arbitration, in an article in The Hindu. A bilateral investment treaty (BIT) is an agreement between two countries that sets out how each will treat investors from the other, and usually how disputes between an investor and the host government will be settled. A free trade agreement (FTA) cuts tariffs and sets rules on trade, and sometimes on investment. Mr. Chawla notes that India has signed BITs with the United Arab Emirates (2024), Israel (2025) and Uzbekistan (2024), and FTAs with New Zealand (April 2026), the United Kingdom (July 2025), the European Free Trade Association (March 2024) and Oman (signed December 2025). Debate has focused on their economic benefits and on investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), under which a foreign investor can sue the host state before an international tribunal. Commercial arbitration is different: it is private dispute resolution under a contract, decided by arbitrators rather than courts. In India it is governed by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, which covers domestic arbitration, international commercial arbitration and the enforcement of foreign awards. Mr. Chawla makes three proposals. First, India's recent FTAs have generally left out ISDS. Since a sizeable share of investment in India is made through contracts between foreign investors and Indian state agencies, future FTAs should state, as the European Union–Australia FTA did, why ISDS is not needed; in India's case, because commercial arbitration remedies are available in India. Second, India's BITs do provide ISDS but separate it from contract disputes: the India–Uzbekistan BIT excludes “disputes arising solely from an alleged breach of a contract”, and investors must first exhaust local remedies in domestic courts or administrative bodies for a specified period. The wording appears to exclude commercial arbitration tribunals seated in India, which Mr. Chawla sees no reason for, so future BITs should let arbitration in India count as a local remedy. Third, India's BITs disfavour third-party funding in ISDS, meaning an outside financier paying a claimant's legal costs for a share of any award. That is understandable for claims against sovereign decisions, he writes, but treaties should make clear it does not signal that such funding is barred in domestic commercial arbitration. The syllabus link is GS3 (investment models) and GS2 (bilateral agreements).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Investor-state awards such as *White Industries (2011)* and the retrospective tax disputes make India wary of ISDS → the 2015 Model BIT narrows investor protection and demands exhaustion of local remedies, and FTAs mostly leave ISDS out → foreign investors, who mostly deal with Indian state agencies through contracts, still want a neutral forum outside Indian courts → the Indian Council of Arbitration argues that treaty text can point them to commercial arbitration seated in India → India's treaty policy becomes a tool to build an arbitration hub and attract capital

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 is India's single code for arbitration** — The Act is based on the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration of 1985. Part I governs arbitrations seated in India, both domestic and international commercial, and Section 34 allows an award to be set aside by a court only on limited grounds. Part II provides for the enforcement of foreign awards under the New York Convention of 1958, which India ratified in 1960 with reservations limiting it to commercial disputes and to countries notified on the basis of reciprocity. In *BALCO v. Kaiser Aluminium (2012)*, the Supreme Court held that Part I does not apply to arbitrations seated abroad. The 2015 amendment introduced time limits for awards through Section 29A and narrowed the ‘public policy’ ground for challenge, and the 2019 amendment provided for an Arbitration Council of India in Part IA.
- 2. India rewrote its investment treaty model after losing an investor-state case** — In *White Industries v. India (2011)*, a tribunal under the India–Australia BIT held that India had failed to provide effective means of enforcing an arbitral award because of long delays in Indian courts. Along with disputes over retrospective taxation involving Vodafone and Cairn, this pushed India to adopt a new Model BIT in 2015. The Model

	BIT uses a narrower, enterprise-based definition of investment, leaves out a most-favoured-nation clause, excludes taxation measures, and requires investors to pursue domestic remedies for at least five years before going to international arbitration. India then served termination notices on most of its older BITs. The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021 withdrew the retrospective tax demands that had led to the Vodafone and Cairn arbitrations. 3. ISDS, commercial arbitration and exhaustion of local remedies are three different things — ISDS is a treaty-based right of a foreign investor to bring a claim against a state before an international tribunal for breach of treaty standards such as fair treatment or protection from expropriation. Commercial arbitration arises from a contract between two parties, which may include a state agency, and is decided under the chosen law and seat. Exhaustion of local remedies is a principle of international law that requires a claimant to use the host country's own remedies before going international. Mr. Chawla's proposal is to treat arbitration seated in India as one such local remedy. 4. Third-party funding has no dedicated law in India — Third-party funding means an outside financier pays a party's legal costs in return for a share of any money recovered. No Indian statute regulates it directly. In <i>Bar Council of India v. A.K. Balaji</i> (2018), the Supreme Court observed that funding of litigation by third parties who are not advocates is not barred, while Bar Council rules forbid advocates from charging fees tied to the outcome. Singapore and Hong Kong amended their laws in 2017 to permit third-party funding in international arbitration, and both are the main regional competitors to India as arbitration seats. Institutionally, India created the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre by a 2019 Act, renamed the India International Arbitration Centre in 2022.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 names investment models, and GS2 names bilateral agreements — An answer on why FDI inflows depend on institutions, not just tax rates, is strengthened by the arbitration angle: investors ask "what happens when a relationship breaks down", as Mr. Chawla puts it. The evolution from the older BITs to the 2015 Model BIT and treaties like India-UAE and India-Uzbekistan is a standard GS2 and GS3 theme. 2. Contract enforcement is the recurring weak point in ease-of-doing-business debates — India long ranked poorly on enforcing contracts in the World Bank's now-discontinued Doing Business reports, and questions on judicial delays and alternative dispute resolution appear across GS2 and the Essay paper. This op-ed gives a fresh, specific link between treaty policy and domestic dispute resolution. 3. Prelims has a stable set of arbitration facts to test — The New York Convention, the UNCITRAL Model Law, the seat-based rule of BALCO, the Arbitration Council of India and the India International Arbitration Centre are all settled facts suited to statement-based questions. None of them will change with the news cycle.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 is based on the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration, 1985. ● Part II of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 provides for enforcement of foreign awards under the New York Convention of 1958, which India applies only to commercial disputes and on the basis of reciprocity. ● In <i>BALCO v. Kaiser Aluminium</i> (2012), the Supreme Court held that Part I of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act does not apply to arbitrations seated outside India. ● Section 29A, inserted in the Arbitration and Conciliation Act by the 2015 amendment, prescribes time limits for making arbitral awards.

ANALYSIS

- The 2019 amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act provides for an Arbitration Council of India to grade arbitral institutions and promote arbitration.
- India's 2015 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty requires a foreign investor to pursue domestic remedies, generally for at least five years, before initiating international arbitration against India.
- The New Delhi International Arbitration Centre, set up by an Act of 2019, was renamed the India International Arbitration Centre in 2022.

- 1. Mr. Chawla turns India's refusal of ISDS into a selling point, but only if Indian enforcement works** — The EU–Australia language he cites works because both sides trust each other's courts. Saying that commercial arbitration in India makes ISDS unnecessary is a claim foreign investors will test against their experience of award enforcement. The White Industries case was precisely about Indian courts taking too long to enforce an award. If awards against state agencies continue to be challenged under Section 34 and appealed for years, the preambular promise will look like a substitute for protection rather than a form of it. The proposal is right in direction, but its credibility rests on courts and on government litigation behaviour, not on treaty drafting.
- 2. The 'local remedies' fix is the cheapest and most useful of the three proposals** — Requiring investors to go to Indian courts for a set period before ISDS is meant to give the Indian system a first chance to correct a wrong. Allowing arbitration seated in India to count serves that purpose equally well while being faster and more neutral in the investor's eyes. It also sends business to Indian arbitrators, lawyers and institutions, which is the capital and entrepreneurship side of the story. The counter-view comes from within government: the Finance Ministry's 2024 guidelines advised that arbitration should not be routinely included in public procurement contracts, especially large ones, because of the state's experience of adverse awards. A government sceptical of arbitration at home will be slow to endorse it in treaties.
- 3. Separating third-party funding in ISDS from funding in commercial arbitration is sound** — ISDS claims challenge sovereign regulation, so an investment fund financing claims against a tax or environmental law raises a real concern about regulatory chill. A commercial dispute between a supplier and a buyer does not carry that concern, and funding helps a capital-short firm, often a smaller one, pursue a valid claim. Treating both the same way is a policy error. The honest risk is that funding without disclosure rules can create conflicts of interest for arbitrators, which is why India needs a regulatory framework rather than silence.
- 4. Treaty text cannot build an arbitration hub by itself** — Singapore and London became arbitration centres because of trusted institutions, a deep pool of arbitrators, and courts that rarely interfere with awards. India has passed the laws and set up the India International Arbitration Centre, yet high-value disputes involving Indian parties are still often seated abroad. Treaty drafting is a signal; the pull comes from speed, cost and predictable enforcement. Mr. Chawla himself says India need not make every treaty an arbitration treaty, which is an admission that the harder work lies at home.
- 5. India's treaty network is still being judged by investors, not only by negotiators** — Since 2015 India has chosen more regulatory freedom over stronger investor protection, and termination of the older BITs left many investors without treaty cover for some years. Supporters argue this protected policy space and that FDI kept flowing anyway. Critics reply that capital that did come may have been priced for higher risk, raising the cost of capital for Indian projects. Linking treaties to a credible domestic arbitration system is a middle path between these positions, which is why the proposal deserves attention.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“India has moved away from investor-state dispute settlement in its recent treaties, but investors still need a credible way to resolve disputes.” In this context, discuss how India’s bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements can be used to strengthen commercial arbitration in India. What domestic reforms are necessary for India to become a global arbitration hub? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Mention India’s recent BITs (UAE, Uzbekistan, Israel) and FTAs (EFTA, UK, Oman, New Zealand), and note that FTAs have generally omitted ISDS. Define ISDS and commercial arbitration in one line each. 2. Body — why India retreated from ISDS — Explain White Industries (2011), the retrospective tax disputes, the 2015 Model BIT with its exhaustion-of-local-remedies requirement, and the termination of older BITs. 3. Body — treaty-level proposals — Give the three proposals: EU–Australia-style text explaining that Indian commercial arbitration makes ISDS unnecessary; letting India-seated arbitration satisfy the local-remedies condition; and clarifying that the ban on third-party funding in ISDS does not extend to domestic commercial arbitration. 4. Body — domestic reforms — List minimal court interference under Section 34, time-bound enforcement, operationalising the Arbitration Council of India, strengthening the India International Arbitration Centre, a regulatory framework for third-party funding, and a change in government litigation behaviour. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that treaties can signal intent but credibility comes from enforcement, and that a trusted arbitration system lowers the cost of capital for India.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs. The Finance Ministry is wary of arbitration while the Commerce Ministry wants to promote India as a hub. How do you reconcile these? Approach: The concern of the Finance Ministry is about poorly drafted contracts and weak defence of government cases, not about arbitration as such. I would propose standard contract clauses with institutional arbitration seated in India, trained government counsel, and a policy of not appealing awards routinely. At the same time, treaty text can point investors to Indian arbitration. Both ministries gain if the state wins cases on merit and pays promptly when it loses. Q2. As the head of a State infrastructure corporation, you face an arbitral award in favour of a foreign contractor. Your legal team wants to challenge it. What do you consider? Approach: I would check whether the award has genuine grounds for challenge under Section 34, such as lack of jurisdiction or conflict with public policy, or whether the appeal is only to delay payment. Delaying a sound award adds interest costs and damages the State’s reputation with investors. If the case is weak, I would recommend payment or a negotiated settlement and record the reasons. Decisions should be taken by a committee with legal and financial members so that officers are not afraid of being blamed for settling. Q3. An interview board asks: should third-party funding of arbitration be allowed in India? Approach: It should be allowed with clear rules, because it helps parties with valid claims but little money, including small firms, get justice. The risks are conflicts of interest and the funding of weak claims for speculation. A framework requiring disclosure of the funder to the tribunal and the other side, and allowing costs orders, would manage those risks. Claims against sovereign regulatory decisions can be treated more strictly than ordinary commercial disputes.

2.3 Mines Secretary Warns Against ‘Squatting’ on Mining Blocks as Lithium-Nickel Processing Scheme Nears Launch

THE NEWS New Delhi. Some miners hold on to their blocks without starting operations on time, a practice Union Mines Secretary Keshav Chandra called ‘squatting’ and a concern the industry must address, speaking on Tuesday at the 60th Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI), The Hindu and The Indian Express report. Mr. Chandra explained that mining begins after an “arduous” process of approvals, including forest and environment clearances. Once the mining lease is signed, miners are expected to begin operations within a “substantial” period, yet some do not. “It affects mineral wealth [of the country]; the production gets compromised,” he said, adding that he had asked members to speed up operations and not violate the rules. “Squatting is not going to help anybody. It is a speculation, so no activity should promote any speculation,” he said. In plain terms, a company that wins a block may sit on it, treating it as an asset that can gain value, instead of producing from it. Separately, he said India is looking “very openly” at a Russian lithium extraction project in Mali, West Africa. Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corporation had approached India last year; the pact was reportedly put on hold over Mali’s political instability. He also said a “very substantial” scheme for domestic processing of lithium and nickel would be launched “very soon” to localise the whole battery ecosystem that relies on the two minerals; details will follow once approvals are received, The Indian Express reports. In April, former Mines Secretary Piyush Goyal had said two unnamed electric-vehicle minerals were shortlisted for a processing policy. The government has also identified four States for critical mineral processing parks, each planned as a complete ecosystem for one mineral. Gujarat, which already has heavy rare earth elements and has developed beneficiation (upgrading raw ore into a richer concentrate) and processing technology, and Andhra Pradesh, identified for a rare earth corridor, will focus on rare earths. Odisha, which has its own nickel reserves and whose eastern location makes it easier to process nickel imported from Indonesia and other countries, will take nickel, and Maharashtra lithium. India has little processing capacity for critical minerals and is 100% import-dependent for cobalt, lithium, nickel, rare earth elements and silicon. It moves two factors of production: land locked in idle leases and capital for processing at home. The syllabus link is GS3 (mineral resources, industrial policy).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The auction regime since 2015 makes miners bid high premiums for blocks → some lease-holders sit on blocks after clearances, treating them as speculative assets rather than producing → mineral land stays idle and output lags just as demand for battery and electronics minerals grows → India remains fully import-dependent for lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earths, with almost no processing capacity → the Centre pushes on three fronts: warnings on squatting, overseas sourcing even in unstable Mali, and a lithium-nickel processing scheme with mineral-specific parks in four States

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The MMDR Act makes auction the only door into mining and sets deadlines for production** — The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 is the parent law for all minerals except petroleum and natural gas. Its 2015 amendment made auction the only method for granting mining leases and composite licences, fixed lease periods at 50 years, and created District Mineral Foundations and the National Mineral Exploration Trust. Under Section 4A(4), a mining lease lapses if production does not begin within two years of the lease being executed, or if mining is discontinued for two years, though the State Government may extend this period on application. States grant most leases and receive royalty, because minerals fall under Entry 23 of the State List subject to Union regulation under Entry 54 of the Union List.
- 2. The 2023 amendment gave the Centre control over auctioning critical minerals** — The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023 added a Part D to the First Schedule listing 24 critical and strategic minerals, and empowered the Central Government to auction concessions for them. It removed six minerals, including lithium, from the list of atomic minerals, so that private companies could explore and mine them. It also created an exploration licence to attract private exploration for deep-seated and critical minerals. The Ministry of Mines had separately identified 30 critical minerals in 2023, and the National Critical Mineral Mission was launched in 2025 to cover exploration, processing, recycling and overseas acquisition.
- 3. Processing, not mining, is the real chokepoint in battery minerals** — Mining yields

	ore, but a battery needs refined chemicals such as lithium carbonate or nickel sulphate, which require processing plants, reagents and technology. China dominates this middle stage for lithium and rare earths and in December 2023 barred the export of rare earth extraction and separation technologies. Indonesia banned exports of nickel ore from 2020 to force processing at home, which is why imported Indonesian nickel is now mostly available as processed intermediates. India's production-linked incentive scheme for advanced chemistry cell batteries, approved in 2021, supports cell manufacturing, but cells need processed minerals as inputs. 4. India secures minerals abroad through KABIL and partnerships — Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) is a joint venture of three public sector companies, National Aluminium Company (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Ltd (HCL) and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd (MECL), set up to acquire critical mineral assets abroad. It signed an agreement in 2024 for lithium exploration blocks in Argentina's Catamarca province. India joined the U.S.-led Minerals Security Partnership in 2023. At home, the Geological Survey of India reported inferred lithium resources in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir in 2023, but inferred resources are an early-stage estimate, not a mineable reserve.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS1 and GS3 both ask about the distribution and security of mineral resources — The GS1 syllabus covers the distribution of key natural resources across the world, including South Asia, and GS3 covers infrastructure and industrial policy. Questions on critical minerals, rare earths and supply-chain dependence on China have become regular since the energy transition gained pace. The four-State processing plan is a ready map-based example. 2. Prelims loves the MMDR Act's schedules and the list of critical minerals — Statement-based questions can ask which authority auctions critical minerals, which minerals were removed from the atomic list, or what KABIL is. Mineral locations, such as nickel in Odisha or rare earth beach sands along the east coast, are classic geography material. 3. Mains links mining to land, federalism and speculation — UPSC has asked about the problems of the mining sector and the balance between development and environment. 'Squatting' adds a governance dimension: an allotted resource that is not used is a loss to the State's revenue and to the country's production.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, auction became the sole method for granting mining leases and composite licences for minerals other than coal, lignite and atomic minerals, which are governed by separate provisions. - Section 4A(4) of the MMDR Act, 1957 provides that a mining lease lapses if production does not start within two years of its execution or if mining is discontinued for two years, subject to extension by the State Government. - The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 added Part D to the First Schedule listing critical and strategic minerals, for which the Central Government conducts auctions. - The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 removed lithium from the list of atomic minerals, opening its exploration and mining to the private sector. - Khanij Bidesh India Ltd is a joint venture of NALCO, Hindustan Copper Ltd and Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd for acquiring critical mineral assets overseas. - In Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India (2024), a nine-judge Constitution Bench held that royalty is not a tax and that States can tax

	mineral rights. ● India became a member of the Minerals Security Partnership, a U.S.-led initiative on critical mineral supply chains, in 2023.
ANALYSIS	1. Squatting is a predictable result of how blocks are sold — When a company bids a high premium for a block, it is buying an option on future mineral prices as much as a place to mine. If prices are low or clearances slow, waiting is cheaper than producing, and a block held idle can also keep a rival out. This is speculation in the economist's sense, and Mr. Chandra is right that it defeats the purpose of auctions. The law already allows a lease to lapse after two years without production, but extensions and slow enforcement blunt the threat. The fix is tighter milestones with automatic forfeiture of performance security, enforced consistently by States. 2. The miners' counter-argument about clearances is partly valid — Mr. Chandra himself described the approval process as "arduous", covering forest and environment clearances. Land acquisition, consent of gram sabhas in Scheduled Areas and the transfer of forest land can take years, and a company delayed by these is not squatting. A blanket label risks punishing firms for the State's own delays. The administrative task is to separate firms stuck in the pipeline from those that have all clearances and still do not produce. Publishing a block-wise status of clearances and production would make that distinction visible. 3. One-mineral-per-State parks make sense only where feedstock is secure — Grouping processing, reagent suppliers and skilled labour around one mineral lowers costs through clustering. Gujarat's existing heavy rare earth technology and Odisha's nickel reserves plus eastern port access are real advantages. Maharashtra's lithium park, however, would depend almost entirely on imported ore or concentrate, since India produces no lithium at scale. A park without assured feedstock becomes an empty industrial estate, so the lithium plan must be tied to overseas supply contracts through KABIL or private firms. The counter-view is that processing hubs everywhere, including Japan and South Korea, run on imported ore, so location near ports and demand can matter more than local mines. 4. Mali shows the price of chasing minerals in unstable places — Resource security pushes India towards countries others avoid, and a Russian state partner in Mali combines two kinds of risk. Mali has seen military takeovers since 2020, left the Economic Community of West African States, and revised its mining code in 2023 to raise the state's share in projects. Partnership with a Russian state corporation also carries sanctions exposure at a time when the U.S. has just armed itself with tariffs against buyers of Russian oil. Mr. Chandra's careful words, "looking at all the possibilities", suggest exploration rather than commitment. The counter-view is that stable jurisdictions are already contracted by richer buyers, and late entrants must accept higher risk to gain any access. 5. A processing scheme will succeed on technology and assured buyers, not subsidy alone — Processing plants are capital-heavy and profitable only at scale, and China's ban on exporting separation technology means India must develop or license it from elsewhere. A subsidy can close a cost gap but cannot create know-how. The scheme should therefore be linked to demand from battery cell makers under the existing incentive scheme, so that processors have buyers. It should also include recycling of used batteries, which can supply lithium and nickel without new mining. Without that link, India risks building capacity that cannot compete with Chinese prices.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's critical mineral strategy has focused on acquiring mines, but the real dependence lies in processing." Examine this statement in light of recent steps to promote lithium, nickel and rare earth processing. Also discuss how speculative holding of mining leases

	undermines the objectives of the auction regime. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that India is 100% import-dependent for cobalt, lithium, nickel, rare earth elements and silicon and has little processing capacity, and that the Mines Secretary has announced a lithium-nickel processing scheme. 2. Body — the processing gap — Explain the difference between mining and processing, China's dominance and its 2023 ban on exporting separation technology, and Indonesia's ore export ban. Describe the four processing parks: Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh for rare earths, Odisha for nickel, Maharashtra for lithium. 3. Body — sourcing abroad — Cover KABIL's Argentina blocks, the Minerals Security Partnership, and the Russian lithium project in Mali with its political and sanctions risks. 4. Body — squatting and the auction regime — Explain the 2015 and 2023 amendments to the MMDR Act, the two-year lapse rule under Section 4A(4), why winners may hold blocks idle, and the genuine delays in forest and environment clearances. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that production from domestic blocks, processing with assured buyers and recycling together reduce dependence more than overseas acquisitions alone.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Director of Mines in a State, you find that several auctioned blocks with all clearances show no production after two years. What do you do? Approach: I would first verify each case: whether all clearances are truly in hand, and whether the delay is due to the lessee or to a pending government action. For lessees with no valid reason, I would issue show-cause notices under the lease terms and the lapse provision of the MMDR Act, and invoke performance security where the rules allow. I would publish a block-wise status list so that the public and the Centre can see progress. Firms stuck on State-side approvals should be helped through a single-window review. Q2. You are the Mines Secretary. A Russian state firm offers India a stake in a lithium project in Mali. What factors would you weigh? Approach: I would assess the geology and cost of the project, the security situation and Mali's mining code, and the exposure to Western sanctions on Russian entities. I would consult the External Affairs Ministry on relations with Mali and the region. A phased approach, starting with technical study and small exploration commitments, would limit risk. Any agreement should secure offtake rights so that minerals actually reach India. Q3. An interview board asks: is sitting on a mining block really wrong if the company paid for it at auction? Approach: Minerals belong to the people, and the State grants a lease so that they are extracted for the economy, not held as a financial bet. Idle blocks mean lost royalty for the State, lost jobs for local people and lost supply for industry. A company that pays for a block accepts the obligation to develop it within the legal time. If it genuinely cannot, it should surrender the block so that someone else can mine it.

2.4 Centre Warns States of Ageing, AI and Climate Strains as Mumbai Plans India's Largest Municipal Bond

THE NEWS New Delhi and Mumbai. States must overhaul spending priorities and strengthen finances as ageing, rapid technological change, urbanisation and climate risks reshape their expenditure, says a background paper the Centre shared with them over the weekend, The Indian Express reports. The Union Finance Ministry circulated the paper ahead of its

conference with State finance ministers on September 18-19. It was written by Sangeeta Das and V Dhanya of the Reserve Bank of India's Department of Economic and Policy Research. The paper notes that States account for around two-thirds of general government expenditure. 'General government' means the Centre and the States taken together, with transfers between them netted out, so the figure means that most public money in India is actually spent by States. For this reason, the paper says, States' fiscal capacity, the quality of their spending and their investment decisions will be critical to sustaining growth, building human capital and ensuring inclusive development as India seeks to become a developed economy by 2047. It estimates that India would need to grow at about 8% a year in real terms, that is, after removing inflation, to reach that goal, placing the onus on States to keep their public finances sustainable. Fiscal capacity means a government's ability to raise revenue and borrow without endangering its finances; quality of spending refers broadly to how much goes to assets and services that raise future output, as against committed items such as salaries, pensions and interest. On the same page, Reuters reports that the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), which governs Mumbai, plans to raise around 95 billion rupees (about ₹9,500 crore, or \$992 million) through its debut bond sale, the most by any local body in India. The money will be raised in one or more tranches, with the first sale due by March, in the last quarter of the financial year, two sources said on condition of anonymity, and the corporation did not reply to a request for comment. A municipal bond is a loan a city government takes from investors, promising regular interest and repayment, usually to fund infrastructure such as roads, water supply and sewerage. The two stories belong together: the paper says urbanisation and climate risk will demand more spending, and the BMC shows a city tapping the capital market for it. The syllabus link is GS2 (fiscal federalism, local government) and GS3 (budgeting, resource mobilisation).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The Constitution assigns health, policing, water, urban services and much of social welfare to States and local bodies → States end up doing about two-thirds of general government spending while the Centre holds the more buoyant taxes → ageing, AI-driven job change, fast urbanisation and climate risk add new, long-term claims on State budgets → the Centre, through an RBI-authored paper, tells States to reprioritise spending and keep finances sustainable to support 8% real growth to 2047 → cities with weak transfers turn to capital markets, and the BMC plans a debut bond of about ₹9,500 crore

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Constitution gives States most spending duties but fewer revenue sources —** Under the Seventh Schedule, the State List covers public order and police, public health, agriculture, water, and local government, while education moved to the Concurrent List through the 42nd Amendment in 1976. The Union controls the most elastic taxes, such as income tax and corporation tax, and after the GST in 2017 States pooled most of their indirect tax powers. This mismatch, called vertical fiscal imbalance, is corrected through tax devolution recommended by the Finance Commission under Article 280. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, chaired by Arvind Panagariya, covers the period 2026-27 to 2030-31. Cesses and surcharges levied by the Union are outside the divisible pool shared with States.
- 2. Article 293 and fiscal responsibility laws limit how much States can borrow —** Article 293 allows a State to borrow only within the territory of India, on the security of its Consolidated Fund, within limits set by its legislature. Under Article 293(3), a State that owes money to the Centre must obtain the Centre's consent before borrowing, which gives the Union a practical say over State borrowing. All States have enacted fiscal responsibility laws, following the Union's Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003, generally targeting a fiscal deficit of 3% of Gross State Domestic Product. Kerala's suit against the Centre over borrowing limits was referred to a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in 2024.
- 3. The 74th Amendment created city governments but not city finances —** The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 added Part IXA, giving constitutional status to municipalities. Article 243W and the Twelfth Schedule list 18 functions, including urban planning, water supply and public health, that States may devolve to them. Article 243X lets the State legislature authorise municipalities to levy taxes and fees, and Article 243Y requires the State Finance Commission to review municipal finances. In practice, property tax remains the main own revenue, and Mumbai lost octroi, which was its biggest revenue source, when GST subsumed it in 2017, so the BMC now

	relies on compensation from the State. 4. Municipal bonds are regulated by SEBI and encouraged under AMRUT — Bengaluru issued a State-guaranteed municipal bond in 1997, and Ahmedabad in 1998 raised the first municipal bond without a State guarantee. SEBI framed regulations in 2015 for the issue and listing of municipal debt securities, which require public issues to be tied to specific projects and include conditions on the issuer's financial record. Under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Centre offers an incentive of ₹13 crore for every ₹100 crore raised through municipal bonds. A bond needs a credit rating, which forces the city to publish audited accounts, and this disclosure discipline is often as valuable as the money.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Fiscal federalism is among the most frequently asked GS2 and GS3 themes — Questions have repeatedly asked about the Finance Commission, the impact of GST on State finances, and the fiscal autonomy of States. The RBI paper gives a new angle: not only how much States receive, but how their spending must change for ageing, climate and technology. 2. Urban local body finance links GS2 governance to GS3 infrastructure — UPSC has asked about the weakness of urban local bodies despite the 74th Amendment. The BMC bond, the largest planned by a local body, is concrete evidence for an answer on how cities can raise capital, and on the limits of that route for smaller municipalities. 3. Demographic transition is now a fiscal topic, not only a social one — Questions on India's demographic dividend now need the other side: an ageing population raises pension and health costs, and States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu will face it first. The RBI paper puts ageing at the head of the list of new strains on States.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 293(3) of the Constitution, a State that is indebted to the Government of India must obtain the Centre's consent before raising any loan. ● Article 293(1) permits a State to borrow only within the territory of India, on the security of its Consolidated Fund. ● Article 243Y requires the State Finance Commission constituted under Article 243-I to review the financial position of municipalities and make recommendations to the Governor. ● Article 243W and the Twelfth Schedule, added by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, list 18 functions that may be devolved to municipalities. ● Municipal bonds issued to the public in India are regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India under regulations framed in 2015. ● The Finance Commission is constituted by the President under Article 280 to recommend the distribution of the net proceeds of shareable taxes between the Union and the States. ● Education was moved from the State List to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976.
ANALYSIS	1. The Centre is asking States to carry the growth burden with tools it largely controls — Two-thirds of general government spending sits with States, but after GST they have limited power to raise taxes on their own, and their borrowing needs the Centre's consent under Article 293(3). The paper's message, that States must keep finances sustainable to support 8% growth, is correct, but it places responsibility where the levers are weakest. Cesses and surcharges outside the divisible pool further reduce what States receive. The counter-view is that many States have weak own-tax effort, low property tax collection and expanding unconditional cash transfers, so the problem is not only their share but also their choices.

	2. Ageing will hit the States that managed population best, first — States in the south, with lower fertility, will see a larger share of elderly people earlier, raising pension and health spending. The same States have argued that population-based devolution formulas penalise them, though the Fifteenth Finance Commission added a demographic performance criterion to reward lower fertility. Pension design matters here, since some States returned to the old defined-benefit pension scheme, which raises future liabilities. The RBI paper is right to flag ageing, but the policy answer must combine pension reform, preventive health spending and a devolution formula that does not reward delay in the demographic transition. 3. AI is a revenue risk as much as a spending demand — Technology that replaces routine work can shrink employment in services, which weakens the income and consumption base on which GST and State taxes depend. It also creates demand for reskilling, which falls mainly on State-run education and skill systems. This is a labour-market shift that shows up in budgets only years later, so early planning is sensible. The counter-view is that AI may also raise productivity and taxable output, so States should invest in digital public services and skills rather than treat it only as a threat. 4. The BMC bond tests the market, but it is not a model for most cities — Mumbai is India's richest city and can raise a record sum because investors trust its revenue base. Most municipalities have weak accounts, low ratings and small revenues, and cannot borrow on similar terms without State guarantees. The bond is still valuable because it forces disclosure, credit rating and project-linked spending, and a successful issue deepens the market for others. The risk is that borrowing substitutes for property tax reform and user charges; debt must be repaid from revenue, so a city that does not fix its own revenue only postpones the problem. 5. Quality of spending is the phrase that should carry the most weight — The paper stresses the quality of spending and investment decisions, not just its size. Money spent on assets that raise future output, such as irrigation, urban transport and climate-resilient infrastructure, pays for itself partly through growth, while committed spending on salaries, pensions and interest crowds out such investment. The Centre's interest-free fifty-year loans to States for capital expenditure have encouraged capital spending, but they come with conditions that reduce State autonomy. The real test of the conference will be whether States leave with clear targets for capital spending and climate adaptation, not general exhortations.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"With States accounting for about two-thirds of general government expenditure, their fiscal choices will decide whether India reaches developed-economy status by 2047." Discuss the emerging pressures on State finances from demographic ageing, technological change, urbanisation and climate risk. How can States and urban local bodies expand their fiscal capacity? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Cite the RBI-authored background paper shared ahead of the September 18-19 conference of State finance ministers: States do about two-thirds of general government spending, and India needs about 8% real growth a year to reach its 2047 goal. 2. Body — the new pressures — Explain ageing and pension and health costs, AI and job change affecting revenues and skilling needs, urbanisation and infrastructure demand, and climate risk and disaster spending, with examples of States most exposed. 3. Body — constitutional constraints — Discuss the Seventh Schedule allocation, vertical fiscal imbalance, GST's effect on State tax autonomy, Article 293 borrowing limits, fiscal responsibility laws and the role of the Sixteenth Finance Commission. 4. Body — expanding fiscal capacity — Suggest better own-tax effort, property tax

reform, rationalising committed spending and pension design, and capital-market access for cities, using the BMC's planned bond of about ₹9,500 crore, SEBI's 2015 municipal debt regulations and AMRUT incentives as examples.

- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that growth to 2047 depends on the quality of State spending as much as its quantity, and that fiscal federalism must match responsibilities with resources.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Finance Secretary of a State with a rising pension bill and a demand to restore the old pension scheme. How do you advise the government?

Approach: I would present the long-term cost of a defined-benefit pension through an actuarial estimate over thirty years, not just the current year's cash savings. I would show how rising pension spending will crowd out health, education and capital spending. Options that protect retirees while keeping costs predictable, such as guaranteed minimums within a contributory system, can address employees' concerns. The decision is political, but it must be taken with full knowledge of its cost to future budgets.

Q2. As Municipal Commissioner of a mid-sized city, the Mayor wants to issue bonds like Mumbai. What steps come first?

Approach: Before borrowing, the city needs audited accrual-based accounts, a credit rating and a clearly defined project with a revenue stream to repay the debt. I would start by improving property tax coverage and collection, since investors look at own revenues. I would also seek the AMRUT incentive and any State support for credit enhancement. Borrowing without these foundations would raise costs and risk default.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the Centre have more control over State finances if States spend most of the money?

Approach: More central control would weaken the federal principle and the accountability of elected State governments to their voters. What is needed is better information and rules, such as transparent reporting of off-budget borrowing and common accounting standards, not direction from Delhi. The Finance Commission and forums like the finance ministers' conference are the right channels for coordination. States should in turn accept fiscal rules they have themselves legislated.

3. Agriculture & Food

All three stories ask the same question of Indian agriculture: who is counted, and who captures the value? The woman who farms but holds no title is invisible to the land record, the smallholder who cannot afford a deeper tube-well pays his richer neighbour for water, and the farmer loses most of the rupee once food leaves the kitchen for the restaurant. In each case the fix is the same in principle: make benefits follow the person who does the work, not the person who holds the paper, the pump or the processing plant.

3.1 Maharashtra's Women Farmers' Law Recognises Landless Women as Farmers Through a 'Woman Farmer Certificate'

THE NEWS Maharashtra. In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, which grants women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of whether they own land, through a document called the 'Woman Farmer Certificate'. Writing in *The Hindu*, Sanchit Gupta and Tanu M. Goyal of the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) call it the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer' that the National Policy for Farmers set out in 2007 but never operationalised. In plain words, a farmer is whoever actually farms, not whoever holds the title deed. A comparable national Bill, introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2011, lapsed. The Act broadens the definitions of 'agriculture' and 'farmer' to cover women residents engaged in agriculture for at least one agricultural season a year, irrespective of the nature of the land, and names landless cultivators, landless livestock rearers, agricultural labourers, plantation labourers and pastoralists. Women will be identified by self-registration or by the Gram Sabha, and a new database of women farmers will be built. In 2025 agriculture employed roughly 110 million women and 127 million men (rural, per the Periodic Labour Force Survey, Census-adjusted); women's farm workforce has more than doubled since 2017-18, and nearly three-quarters of rural women workers are in agriculture, against less than half of men. More than 41% of female agricultural workers were unpaid in 2025, against 20% of men, while nearly 63% of men were own-account workers against 39% of women. Yet only 14% of operational holdings are with women (Agriculture Census 2015-16), because land records are mostly in men's names and every State uses its land revenue records as the 'source of truth' for schemes. Women are only 23% of beneficiaries of PM-KISAN, which pays ₹6,000 a year to eligible landholding farmer families, and below one-third in most States. Meghalaya (70%) and Kerala (44%) stand apart because of matrilineal and customary tenure and Kudumbashree group farming; in Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, women are nearly two-thirds of the workforce but a small fraction of beneficiaries. The authors urge linking the certificates to Agri Stack, the Union Agriculture Ministry's digital platform, and issuing Farmer IDs to women, noting that the United Nations has named 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer. The syllabus link is GS1 (role of women) and GS3 (land reforms, farm support).

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Patriarchal inheritance and custom put land records in men's names → States use land revenue records to decide who is a 'farmer' for schemes → male out-migration and rural distress push more women into farm work, much of it unpaid → women do nearly half the farm work but hold 14% of operational holdings and 23% of PM-KISAN benefits → Maharashtra legislates an activity-based 'Woman Farmer Certificate' in July 2026, delinking recognition from land

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The National Policy for Farmers, 2007 defined a farmer by the work done, not the title held** — The National Policy for Farmers, 2007 was adopted by the Union government on the basis of the reports of the National Commission on Farmers chaired by M.S. Swaminathan. It defined a 'farmer' as a person actively engaged in the economic or livelihood activity of growing crops and producing other primary agricultural commodities, and expressly included agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poultry and livestock rearers, fishers, beekeepers, pastoralists and planting labourers, as well as tribal families engaged in shifting cultivation and the collection of forest produce. A policy statement, however, creates no enforceable entitlement, so schemes continued to use land ownership as the eligibility test. The Women Farmers' Entitlements Bill, 2011, a private member's Bill moved by Swaminathan as a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha, sought statutory recognition for women farmers but lapsed. Maharashtra's law is the first State statute to convert the 2007 definition into law.

	2. Land and land records are State subjects, which is why a State could lead — Entry 14 of the State List covers agriculture, Entry 18 covers land, including rights in or over land, land tenures and the relation of landlord and tenant, and Entry 45 covers land revenue, including the maintenance of land records and records of rights. The record of rights, known by names such as the 7/12 extract in Maharashtra and the jamabandi in the north, is therefore a State document, and it is the document most welfare schemes rely on. The Centre's role is to fund and standardise digitisation through the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme. Because the gatekeeping document is a State record, a State law is the natural place to create an alternative route to recognition. 3. Women's legal right to agricultural land has run ahead of the records — Section 4(2) of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 originally left the devolution of tenancy rights in agricultural land to State tenancy laws, many of which favoured male heirs. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 omitted that clause and made daughters coparceners in the joint family property with the same rights as sons. In <i>Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma</i> (2020), the Supreme Court held that a daughter's coparcenary right exists by birth, regardless of whether the father was alive on the date of the 2005 amendment. The law of inheritance is thus largely equal on paper for Hindu women, but mutation of land records in their favour depends on practice, family pressure and local administration, which is why ownership figures remain low. 4. PM-KISAN and Agri Stack both run on land records — PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Scheme, fully funded by the Union government, launched in February 2019, that transfers ₹6,000 a year in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 directly into the bank accounts of landholding farmer families, defined as husband, wife and minor children. It excludes institutional landholders, income-tax payers, holders of constitutional posts and certain professionals. Agri Stack, built under the Digital Agriculture Mission approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2024, has three registries: a Farmers' Registry that issues a unique Farmer ID, geo-referenced village maps and a Crop Sown Registry. Because the Farmer ID is seeded from land records, any exclusion in those records is carried into the digital system unless an activity-based entry route, such as Maharashtra's certificate, is added.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. The syllabus names the issue in two papers — GS1 covers the role of women and women's organisations and social empowerment, while GS3 covers land reforms, direct and indirect farm subsidies and e-technology to aid farmers. 'Feminisation of agriculture' is a standard Mains theme, and examiners reward answers that separate women's rising participation from their lack of ownership, credit and recognition. This story supplies a fresh legislative example and hard numbers on the recognition gap. 2. Prelims tests scheme design and data sources — UPSC regularly asks about eligibility conditions of flagship schemes such as PM-KISAN, the agencies that run surveys such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey and the Agriculture Census, and the concept of an operational holding. It also asks about International Years declared by the United Nations. The Maharashtra law connects all of these, and a student who understands why a land-based scheme excludes women can answer statement questions that test the difference between ownership and operation. 3. The interview board likes the federal angle — Because land is a State subject and a national Bill lapsed, the story illustrates how States act as laboratories of policy. A candidate may be asked whether the Maharashtra model should be adopted nationally, and must be able to argue both the case for standardisation and the risk of a one-size-fits-all identity scheme.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The National Policy for Farmers, 2007, framed on the recommendations of the

National Commission on Farmers chaired by M.S. Swaminathan, defines a farmer by activity and includes agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, livestock rearers and pastoralists.

- Maintenance of land records falls under Entry 45 of the State List, and land, including land tenures, falls under Entry 18 of the State List.
- PM-KISAN is a Central Sector Scheme that provides ₹6,000 a year in three equal instalments by direct benefit transfer to eligible landholding farmer families.
- The Agriculture Census, conducted every five years by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, counts operational holdings, meaning land operated as one technical unit irrespective of title.
- The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 made daughters coparceners with rights equal to sons and omitted the provision that had left agricultural tenancy rights to State tenancy laws.
- In the Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Statistics Office, unpaid helpers in household enterprises are classified as self-employed workers.
- Agri Stack, under the Digital Agriculture Mission, comprises a Farmers' Registry with a unique Farmer ID, geo-referenced village maps and a Crop Sown Registry.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The certificate fixes identity, but the money still follows the land** — The Maharashtra law lets a landless woman prove she is a farmer, but PM-KISAN, the largest direct transfer to farmers, is defined by landholding under Union guidelines that no State can rewrite. A certificate therefore unlocks State schemes and perhaps extension services, but not the central cash transfer, unless the Centre adds an activity-based eligibility route. The real test of the law is how many State schemes, credit products and insurance enrolments accept the certificate as sufficient. Without that, it risks becoming a card of recognition without a key to any door. The counter-view is that identity must come first, since no scheme can be redesigned for a group that has never been counted.
- 2. Gram Sabha identification is both the strength and the weak point** — Verification by the Gram Sabha is sensible because neighbours know who actually works the fields, and it avoids the cost of a new bureaucracy. But Gram Sabhas are often dominated by landowning men and dominant castes, the very groups whose interests may be threatened if a daughter-in-law or a Dalit labourer acquires an independent claim. Self-registration avoids that gatekeeping but opens the door to inflated or duplicate claims. A workable design would combine the two: self-registration with a public list read out in a special women's Gram Sabha, and a time-bound appeal to the block office. The authors' call for a robust information campaign is not a detail; it decides who hears about the right at all.
- 3. Digital agriculture will hard-code the old bias unless it is rebuilt now** — Agri Stack's Farmer ID is seeded from land records, so the digital system is being built on the same gatekeeper that excluded women on paper. Digital systems scale whatever rules they are given: an exclusion that once needed a clerk's discretion becomes automatic across crores of records. This is why the authors' recommendation to link the certificate to Agri Stack is the most important line in the article. The window to add an 'activity-based farmer' field is now, while the registries are being populated, because retrofitting identity systems later is costly and slow.
- 4. Recognising women farmers must not become a way of accepting distress** — Much of the rise in women's farm work reflects men leaving for non-farm jobs and women staying behind on small, low-productivity plots, often as unpaid family labour. There is a risk that recognition is celebrated as empowerment while the underlying pattern, women left in the least rewarding sector, is ignored. The honest answer is that

	recognition is necessary but not sufficient: it gives access to credit, machinery subsidies and training, which can raise productivity, but the long-run goal is also better non-farm opportunities for rural women. The 41% unpaid share shows the problem is not just identity but control over income. 5. Standardisation across States will decide whether this spreads or fragments — Land is a State subject, and a national Bill lapsed in 2011, so progress will come State by State. That is useful experimentation, but if every State defines ‘woman farmer’ differently, a migrant woman or a pastoralist moving across State lines may be recognised in one and not in the next. The authors propose common definitions, certificate formats and databases across States, which the Centre could encourage through Agri Stack standards without legislating on a State subject. Meghalaya and Kerala show that alternative institutions, customary tenure and collectives, already raise women’s access; the lesson is that the channel matters more than the title.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Women in rural India are increasingly the farmers, but the state still recognises the landowner.” In the light of Maharashtra’s Women Farmers’ Empowerment law, examine how the reliance on land records in agricultural schemes excludes women, and suggest measures to make recognition translate into access. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Cite the gap: women are close to half the agricultural workforce (about 110 million women against 127 million men in 2025, per PLFS) but hold only 14% of operational holdings and are 23% of PM-KISAN beneficiaries. Introduce Maharashtra’s July 2026 law and its ‘Woman Farmer Certificate’. 2. Body — how exclusion happens — Explain the chain: patriarchal inheritance and weak mutation put titles in men’s names; States use land revenue records as the source of truth; schemes such as PM-KISAN and now Agri Stack’s Farmer ID are seeded from them. Add the 41% unpaid share and the J&K and Himachal examples, where women are nearly two-thirds of the workforce but a small fraction of beneficiaries. 3. Body — what Maharashtra does and its limits — Describe the activity-based definition (at least one season a year), the named categories such as landless cultivators and pastoralists, and identification by self-registration or Gram Sabha. Discuss limits: central schemes remain land-based, Gram Sabha capture, awareness gaps, and database duplication. 4. Body — measures — Recommend linking certificates to Agri Stack and issuing Farmer IDs; an activity-based eligibility route in central schemes; joint titling and time-bound mutation in favour of women heirs; group farming models such as Kudumbashree and schemes such as Odisha’s KALIA that reach sharecroppers; and common inter-State standards. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that in the UN’s International Year of the Woman Farmer, India’s task is to shift the unit of recognition from the plot to the person, so that women’s work, already a reality, becomes a legal and economic entitlement.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Collector of a Maharashtra district tasked with issuing Woman Farmer Certificates. How do you make sure the most marginal women are reached? Approach: I would start with lists that already exist, such as MGNREGA job cards, self-help group rosters and livestock census records, to identify likely applicants rather than wait for applications. Special women’s Gram Sabhas would be held, with the draft list read aloud and a clear appeal route to the block office within a fixed time. Agriculture assistants and Anganwadi and ASHA workers would carry the information door to door, since the law depends on women knowing it exists. I would track certificates issued by landless, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women separately, because an average

hides who is left out.

Q2. As Secretary, Agriculture in the State, what would you do so that the certificate changes access, not just identity?

Approach: I would notify that the certificate is sufficient proof of farmer status for every State agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries scheme, and ask banks through the State Level Bankers' Committee to accept it for crop loans and Kisan Credit Cards. I would ensure the database is linked with the Farmers' Registry under Agri Stack, with de-duplication rules that do not remove a woman merely because her husband is already registered. I would also write to the Union Ministry proposing an activity-based route in central schemes. Progress would be reported as scheme uptake by certificate holders, not certificates printed.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the Union government make joint land titles for spouses mandatory?

Approach: Joint titling would give women security against eviction and a claim on credit, and it addresses the root cause that the Maharashtra certificate works around. But land is a State subject, so a Union mandate would face constitutional and political resistance, and forced joint titles without awareness may exist only on paper. A better path is incentives: lower stamp duty for registration in a woman's or joint name, time-bound mutation for women heirs, and conditional central grants for States that adopt joint titling. Recognition of women as farmers and ownership by women are complementary, not alternatives.

3.2 Punjab Draws 152% of Its Extractable Groundwater, and Falling Water Tables Shift Wealth to Large Farmers

THE NEWS Punjab. An editorial in The Hindu on Wednesday, titled 'Water wealth', argues that groundwater exploitation in Punjab now disincentivises small farmers and widens the wealth gap among cultivators. According to the 2025-26 Dynamic Groundwater Assessment, Punjab's groundwater extraction rate was 152%, meaning the State draws about one and a half times the groundwater that can be extracted each year without drawing down its reserves. Interventions have reduced the number of 'over-exploited' blocks by five over the last two assessments, but 72% of Punjab's 153 blocks remain in the 'red zone', the highest share among States. The principal consumer is irrigation for rice and wheat, amounting to nearly 25 billion cubic metres a year in the latest estimate. The fraction of observation wells with water below 40 metres in the post-monsoon period grew by two percentage points between 2022 and 2025. The editorial traces the problem to policy: a food-security strategy produced a concentrated rice-wheat system in which assured procurement, subsidised electricity and groundwater access made intensive cultivation less risky than alternatives, while uncertainty over storage, prices, processing and supply chains for other crops went unaddressed. The new point is distributional. A recent study in the Economic and Political Weekly found that farmers with marginal holdings use water more efficiently, but wealthier farmers can reach lower water tables and draw larger volumes. As the water table drops, those who cannot afford deeper tube-wells are forced to buy water, transferring wealth to larger landowners and creating unregulated dependencies. A separate study by two members of the same team, published in Discover Sustainability, found that in Sangrur and Barnala larger farms earned higher returns but recorded lower groundwater productivity for paddy than smaller farms. Groundwater productivity means crop output per unit of groundwater used. Depletion thus raises the capital needed for irrigation, privileging farmers with better access to finance. The editorial notes that the 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' (save water, earn money) scheme, which pays farmers cash for every unused kilowatt-hour of pumping power below a threshold, is promising but has low enrolment. It proposes that Punjab use part of its electricity subsidy bill to support smallholders directly, help collectivise irrigation infrastructure and support a transition to other crops, so that benefits follow the cultivator, including tenants, rather than the owners of land or pumps. The syllabus link is GS3 on irrigation, cropping patterns, farm subsidies and resource conservation.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Food-security push after the 1960s makes Punjab the centre of Green Revolution rice-wheat → assured MSP procurement and free or subsidised farm power make paddy the least risky crop → groundwater extraction outruns

recharge, reaching 152% in 2025-26 with 72% of blocks in the red zone → falling water tables raise the cost of deeper tube-wells → small farmers buy water from large landowners, turning depletion into a transfer of wealth

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Groundwater assessments classify blocks by the share of recharge that is pumped out** — India's Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment is conducted jointly by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and State groundwater departments using the methodology of the Ground Water Estimation Committee, 2015. The key measure is the stage of groundwater extraction: annual extraction divided by the annual extractable groundwater resource, expressed as a percentage. An assessment unit, usually a block, is 'safe' at up to 70%, 'semi-critical' above 70% and up to 90%, 'critical' above 90% and up to 100%, and 'over-exploited' above 100%; units with saline groundwater are classed separately. A figure of 152% for a whole State means extraction is being sustained by mining stored water that will not return on any human timescale.
- 2. The law still treats groundwater as an attachment to land** — Water, including irrigation, is a State subject under Entry 17 of the State List, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List on inter-State rivers. Under common law principles reflected in the Indian Easements Act, 1882, the owner of land has the right to draw groundwater beneath it, which means that whoever can drill deeper and pump harder effectively owns more of a shared aquifer. The Central Ground Water Authority, constituted under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, regulates extraction mainly by industry and infrastructure, not farm pumping. Model groundwater Bills circulated by the Centre have proposed treating groundwater as a common resource held in public trust, an idea the Supreme Court applied to natural resources in *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath* (1997).
- 3. Punjab's rice-wheat lock-in was built by policy, not by nature** — Paddy is not a traditional crop of semi-arid Punjab; its spread followed the Green Revolution, assured procurement of wheat and paddy at the minimum support price by the Food Corporation of India and State agencies, and free electricity for farm pumps introduced in the late 1990s. The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 prohibits sowing paddy nurseries and transplanting paddy before notified dates, so that transplanting coincides with the monsoon and evaporation losses fall. The side effect is a later harvest and a shorter window before wheat sowing, which is one reason farmers burn paddy stubble in October and November. Expert groups, including the committees headed by S.S. Jhul, have repeatedly recommended diversifying part of the paddy area to other crops.
- 4. The Centre's groundwater and irrigation schemes target demand as well as supply** — The Atal Bhujal Yojana, a World Bank-assisted Central Sector Scheme launched in December 2019, promotes community-led groundwater management in water-stressed areas of seven States: Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh; Punjab is not among them. The 'Per Drop More Crop' component of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (2015) subsidises micro-irrigation such as drip and sprinklers. PM-KUSUM (2019) supports solar pumps and the solarisation of agricultural feeders, which can cut the fiscal cost of farm power but, if pumping becomes free at the margin, can also raise extraction. Crop diversification programmes under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana target the original Green Revolution States.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 names every link in this chain** — The GS3 syllabus lists major cropping patterns, irrigation systems, and direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices. Mains questions have repeatedly asked about the sustainability of the rice-wheat system, crop diversification in north-west India, and the link between subsidies and resource depletion. The editorial adds the equity dimension that most answers miss:

	depletion is not only an environmental problem but a regressive one. 2. Prelims asks for categories, institutions and legal bases — Questions on groundwater have tested the CGWB and CGWA, the categories used in assessments, and schemes such as Atal Bhujal Yojana and its coverage. Knowing the thresholds (70%, 90%, 100%) and the legal basis of the CGWA under the Environment (Protection) Act makes such questions straightforward. 3. Essay and GS4 draw on the commons — The ‘tragedy of the commons’, where individually rational pumping destroys a shared resource, is a staple for essays on sustainability and for ethics case studies on inter-generational equity. Punjab is the clearest Indian example, and the editorial’s point about wealth transfer gives it a justice angle.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● In the Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment, an assessment unit with a stage of groundwater extraction above 100% is classified as ‘over-exploited’; above 90% and up to 100% is ‘critical’; above 70% and up to 90% is ‘semi-critical’. ● The stage of groundwater extraction is the ratio of annual groundwater extraction to the annual extractable groundwater resource, expressed as a percentage. ● The Central Ground Water Authority is constituted under Section 3(3) of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. ● The Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment is carried out jointly by the Central Ground Water Board and State groundwater departments using the Ground Water Estimation Committee, 2015 methodology. ● Water, including irrigation, is a State subject under Entry 17 of the State List, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List. ● The Atal Bhujal Yojana, a World Bank-assisted scheme for community-led groundwater management, covers seven States, and Punjab is not one of them. ● The Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009 prohibits transplanting paddy before a date notified by the State government.
ANALYSIS	1. Groundwater depletion works like a regressive tax — When the water table falls, the cost of irrigation rises for everyone, but it rises as a lump: a deeper bore and a bigger submersible pump. A large farmer can spread that cost over many acres and borrow cheaply; a marginal farmer cannot, and so becomes a buyer of water from the neighbour who could. The editorial’s evidence that small farmers use water more efficiently makes the outcome perverse: the more efficient user is pushed out and pays rent to the less efficient one. This is why the problem cannot be left to ‘market adjustment’; the market here rewards access to capital, not efficiency. 2. Free power is the subsidy that most rewards the biggest pumper — An unmetered, free electricity supply means the benefit each farmer receives is proportional to the horsepower of his pump and the hours he runs it, which in turn tracks landholding and wealth. A tenant or a farmer without a tube-well receives nothing directly. ‘Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao’ is the right idea because it keeps the entitlement but pays farmers to leave it unused, turning saved water into income. Its low enrolment, however, suggests farmers fear it is a first step towards ending free power, so its success depends on trust and on a credible guarantee that the base entitlement will not be cut. The counter-view is that free power is a political settlement so entrenched that only voluntary, compensated schemes can move it. 3. Efficiency alone will not save the aquifer while paddy remains the safest crop — The editorial notes that the scale of demand continues to overwhelm gains in efficiency.

	Drip irrigation and better pumps lower water use per hectare, but if the saved water is used to expand or intensify paddy, total extraction does not fall; economists call this a rebound effect. The binding constraint is that assured procurement at MSP makes paddy far less risky than maize, pulses or cotton, which lack comparable storage, processing and price assurance. Unless the alternative crop is as safe to grow as paddy, diversification schemes will continue to under-deliver, as they have for decades. 4. The nation's food security was bought with Punjab's water, and the nation should share the bill — Punjab's rice goes largely into the central pool, which means the State has in effect exported its groundwater embedded in grain to the rest of India. Asking Punjab alone to bear the cost of transition, lower incomes, stranded tube-well investments and political backlash, is neither fair nor likely to work. A credible transition would include central support per hectare shifted out of paddy, procurement or price support for alternative crops, and investment in processing for those crops. The counter-argument is that Punjab's own power subsidy is a State choice the Centre should not underwrite; the answer is to tie central support to State reform of that subsidy. 5. Benefits must follow the cultivator, which runs into the same record problem as women farmers — The editorial's best line is that welfare should subsidise access to water rather than groundwater extraction, and should reach tenants as well as owners. But tenancy in Punjab is largely oral and unrecorded, so a tenant has no document to claim a benefit, exactly as a woman farmer lacks a title in Maharashtra. Collective irrigation, such as shared tube-wells owned by water users' groups, would give small farmers access without each needing a deep bore. Any redesign must therefore begin with a way to identify the actual cultivator, or the subsidy will again flow to the name on the land record.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"In Punjab, falling groundwater tables have turned an environmental crisis into a mechanism of rural inequality." Examine the statement. Suggest how farm subsidies and cropping incentives could be redesigned to protect both the aquifer and the small farmer. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State the facts: the 2025-26 Dynamic Groundwater Assessment puts Punjab's extraction at 152%, with 72% of its 153 blocks in the red zone; rice-wheat irrigation uses nearly 25 billion cubic metres a year. Define the stage of extraction in one line. 2. Body — how the crisis was made — Explain the Green Revolution legacy, assured MSP procurement of paddy and wheat, and free farm power, which made paddy the lowest-risk crop. Note the Subsoil Water Act, 2009 and its side effect on stubble burning. 3. Body — the inequality mechanism — Use the EPW finding that marginal farmers use water more efficiently but cannot follow the falling water table, so they buy water from larger owners, and the Sangrur-Barnala finding of lower groundwater productivity on larger farms. Link to the legal rule that ties groundwater to land ownership. 4. Body — redesign — Propose redirecting part of the power subsidy to smallholders and tenants as direct support, scaling up 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' with a guaranteed base entitlement, collective irrigation, central support and price assurance for alternative crops, and a legal shift towards treating groundwater as a common resource. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the aquifer and the smallholder can be protected together only if subsidies follow the cultivator and reward saved water rather than

extracted water, with the Centre sharing the cost of a transition from which the whole country once benefited.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the Deputy Commissioner of Sangrur. Small farmers complain that large landowners charge them exorbitant rates for irrigation water. What can you do?

Approach: I cannot fix the price of privately pumped water, but I can reduce the dependency. I would identify villages where many small farmers lack tube-wells and help them form water users' groups to share a community tube-well, drawing on MGNREGA, cooperative credit and any State irrigation funds. I would ask the power utility to prioritise feeders for such collective connections. Agriculture officers would promote shorter-duration paddy varieties and alternative crops with assured buyers. I would also document the prevailing water rates, because evidence of the wealth transfer is what persuades the State to redesign subsidies.

Q2. As Secretary, Power in Punjab, how would you raise enrolment in 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao'?

Approach: Low enrolment signals distrust, so the first step is a written guarantee that joining will never reduce a farmer's free entitlement and that metering is only for paying the incentive. Payments must be prompt and visible, ideally credited each billing cycle, so that neighbours see the scheme working. I would enlist farmer unions and cooperative societies as partners rather than treat them as opponents. I would also publish village-wise savings and payouts, turning conservation into a source of local pride and income.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India stop procuring paddy from Punjab to save its groundwater?

Approach: Abruptly ending procurement would devastate farm incomes and the rural economy of Punjab and could create serious unrest, without any guarantee that farmers would move to water-saving crops. The problem is not procurement itself but that no other crop enjoys comparable assurance. A phased approach would cap or taper paddy procurement in over-exploited blocks while offering equal price assurance and processing support for alternatives such as maize and pulses, with central help per hectare shifted. The goal is to change the relative risk of crops, not to punish farmers for responding to incentives the state created.

3.3 Farmers Get 57.8% of the Food Rupee Spent at Home, Only 8.4% When Eating Out

THE NEWS New Delhi. In an article in The Indian Express, Sudha Narayanan and Barun Deb Pal of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), India, and Aditi Gautam of Michigan State University present what they describe as the first systematic estimate for all food, covering 2011-12 to 2023-24. Using India's supply-use tables, which record transactions between every sector of the economy, they apply a method called the 'Food Dollar series' to trace each rupee back through retail, transport, processing and service to the farm. The 'farm share' is the portion that accrues to agriculture itself. When a consumer spent a rupee on food at home in 2023-24, as much as 57.8% accrued to the farm, up from 51.8% in 2011-12. For food eaten away from home, the farm share was just 8.4% and has been falling, from about 10% in the 2010s. The gap is expected, since restaurant preparation, service and trade absorb value along longer chains. India's farm share is markedly higher than elsewhere; estimates for 61 countries over 2005-15 put the farm share of at-home food spending at about 27%, and in the United States the farm share of spending on food away from home is just 4%. Household food purchases are still dominated by unprocessed or minimally processed, perishable, high-value items. The share of households consuming any processed and packaged food (abbreviated 'PPF' by the authors) rose from 82.2% to 96.6% between 2011-12 and 2022-23, but such food barely rose as a share of monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE). The processing industry is still dominated by low-margin milling, mostly unorganised and low in value addition. Eating out is about 13% of total food consumption, much lower than in the US and China. The authors expect the overall farm share to decline as these trends advance. They caution that a lower share can coexist with higher net returns: farmers earn just 3-5% of the retail price of gherkins, yet make more than from tomatoes, where their share is higher. A

high share does not guarantee profit either: Amul's cooperative dairy farmers have historically received more than 60% of the retail price, but rising feed costs can still squeeze their incomes. Their prescription is farmer ownership of downstream food, beverage and logistics enterprises, where future and better-paying jobs are likely to emerge. The syllabus link is GS3: food processing and supply chains.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Indian diets remain built on fresh, minimally processed food bought for home cooking → short value chains leave a large share, 57.8% in 2023-24, with the farm → rising incomes bring packaged food into nearly every household and push more eating out → food away from home passes through restaurants and services where the farm share is only 8.4% and falling → the overall farm share is set to decline, so farmers must own downstream enterprises to capture the value moving off the farm

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The farm share measures where the consumer's rupee goes, not what the farmer earns** — The Food Dollar series was developed by the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture to divide every dollar of consumer food spending between the farm and the 'marketing' activities after it: processing, packaging, transport, wholesale and retail trade, and food service. It uses input-output tables, which show how much each industry buys from every other, so it captures the whole food system rather than one commodity. It differs from the 'price spread' often quoted for onions or tomatoes, which compares farm-gate and retail prices of a single product. The farm share is a share of gross revenue; the farmer's net income depends further on input costs such as seed, fertiliser, feed and labour.
- 2. Engel's law explains why the farm share falls as countries get richer** — Engel's law states that as household income rises, the proportion spent on food falls, even if absolute food spending rises. Within food, richer households also buy more convenience, processing, packaging and eating out, so a larger part of each rupee pays for services rather than raw produce. India's data come from the National Statistics Office's Household Consumption Expenditure Surveys, which report monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE), and from the supply-use tables compiled as part of the national accounts. A high farm share is therefore typical of economies where food is mostly bought fresh and cooked at home.
- 3. The Union government's food processing push works through three main schemes** — The Ministry of Food Processing Industries runs the Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana (2017), an umbrella Central Sector Scheme for mega food parks, cold chains and agro-processing clusters. The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises scheme (PMFME), launched in 2020 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, supports small, unorganised units through credit-linked subsidies and a One District One Product approach. The Production Linked Incentive Scheme for the Food Processing Industry (2021) rewards large firms for incremental sales and branding. Foreign direct investment up to 100% is allowed in food processing under the automatic route, and up to 100% under the government route for trading, including e-commerce, in food products manufactured or produced in India.
- 4. Farmer ownership downstream already has two Indian models** — The Anand pattern of dairy cooperatives began with the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union in 1946, whose brand is Amul; the National Dairy Development Board, set up in 1965 at Anand, scaled it nationally through Operation Flood from 1970. Farmers own the collection, processing and marketing, which is why they receive a large share of the retail price. The second model is the Farmer Producer Organisation, registered either as a cooperative or as a producer company, a legal form introduced by the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2002 on the recommendation of a committee headed by Y.K. Alagh. The Central Sector Scheme for the formation and promotion of 10,000 FPOs was launched in 2020.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	GS3 lists food processing and supply chains as a named topic — The syllabus asks about food processing and related industries in India: scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, and supply chain management. Mains questions have asked why food processing remains underdeveloped and how it can raise farm incomes. This article supplies a rare, quantified frame: the farm share of the food rupee, and why a high share is not necessarily good news. Doubling farm incomes and marketing reform recur in Mains — Questions on farm incomes, APMC reform, e-NAM, contract farming and FPOs appear regularly. The gherkin and Amul examples are exactly the kind of concrete evidence examiners reward, showing the candidate understands that share and income are different things. Prelims tests scheme architecture — UPSC has asked about the features of food processing schemes, FDI rules in food retail and processing, and the legal form of producer companies. Knowing which schemes are Central Sector and which are Centrally Sponsored is a common trap.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Food Dollar series, which divides consumer food spending between the farm and post-farm marketing activities, was developed by the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. ● Engel's law states that as household income rises, the proportion of income spent on food declines. ● The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme that follows a One District One Product approach. ● The Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana is an umbrella Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries covering mega food parks and cold chain infrastructure. ● Producer companies were introduced into company law by the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2002, following the recommendations of a committee chaired by Y.K. Alagh. ● The National Dairy Development Board was set up in 1965 with its headquarters at Anand, Gujarat, and implemented Operation Flood from 1970. ● Up to 100% foreign direct investment is permitted under the government approval route for trading, including through e-commerce, of food products manufactured or produced in India.
ANALYSIS	India's high farm share is a sign of a shallow food industry, not of a fair one — A 57.8% farm share looks like good news for farmers, but it mostly reflects how little happens to Indian food between the field and the kitchen: little processing, little packaging, little branded retail. Countries where farms receive about 27% are not necessarily exploiting farmers; they have food systems that add much more value after the farm. The authors themselves expect the share to fall as incomes rise. Policy should therefore target farmers' absolute income and their stake in the value added, not defend a high share for its own sake. Treating a rising share as a success could even discourage the processing investment that creates jobs. The value is moving to the restaurant, where the farmer is least present — The farm share of food away from home is 8.4% and falling, and eating out, now about 13% of food consumption, is the fastest-growing part of the food economy. Restaurants, cloud kitchens and delivery platforms buy through wholesalers and aggregators, and the farmer has no contract with them. As this segment grows, more of the national food rupee will accrue to services the farmer does not own. The practical response is direct

supply links between FPOs and food-service chains, and farmer-owned ready-to-cook products, not an attempt to regulate restaurant margins.

3. **Share and income are different, so input costs matter as much as margins** — The gherkin case shows a tiny share can come with good profits, because contract farming delivers assured prices, inputs and exports. The Amul case shows a large share can still leave farmers squeezed if feed costs rise and retail prices do not follow. Much public debate on ‘middlemen’ assumes a lower farm share means exploitation, which the evidence does not support. A farmer is better served by lower input costs, better yields and stable prices than by removing an intermediary who may in fact be providing storage, credit and transport. The counter-view is that in many mandis, cartelised traders do extract rents, so the answer is competition, not the abolition of trade.
4. **Farmer ownership downstream is right, but India’s FPOs are not yet equipped for it** — The authors’ prescription, farmer ownership of food, beverage and logistics enterprises, is the logic of Amul applied beyond milk. But most FPOs are young, thinly capitalised and lack professional management, and processing needs working capital, quality certification and brand building. Milk succeeded because it is daily, perishable and needs collective chilling; grains and vegetables are harder to organise. The realistic path is for FPOs to start with primary processing, grading, sorting, cleaning and storage, and partner with private processors through equity or long-term contracts, rather than attempt branded consumer products at once.
5. **The first systematic measure should become an official statistic** — India’s arguments about farm prices have run on anecdote, typically a viral comparison of a vegetable’s farm-gate price with its city retail price. The authors note that until now there was virtually no systematic measure of the farm share of all food spending. Since the method uses supply-use tables that the National Statistics Office already compiles, the Ministry of Agriculture or MoSPI could publish such a series regularly, as the USDA does. Regular data would let policy test whether schemes like PMFME and the FPO programme actually raise the share of value that farmers capture.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

“A high farm share in consumer food spending is often read as fairness to farmers, but it may equally signal an underdeveloped food processing sector.” Discuss with reference to recent estimates for India. How can farmers capture a larger share of post-harvest value? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Define the farm share and cite the IFPRI estimates: 57.8% of at-home food spending in 2023-24 (up from 51.8% in 2011-12) but only 8.4% of spending on food eaten out, against about 27% for at-home food across 61 countries.
2. **Body — why India’s share is high** — Explain the dominance of fresh, minimally processed food, the low share of packaged food in MPCE despite near-universal consumption (82.2% to 96.6% of households), low-margin unorganised milling, and eating out at only about 13% of food consumption. Link to Engel’s law.
3. **Body — why share is not income** — Use the gherkin example (3-5% of retail price but better returns than tomatoes) and the Amul example (over 60% share but squeezed by feed costs). Distinguish gross share from net income.
4. **Body — capturing value** — Discuss FPOs and producer companies, the cooperative dairy model, PMFME, Kisan SAMPADA and PLI, contract farming, direct links to food service and logistics, and a regular official farm-share statistic.
5. **Conclusion** — Conclude that as the farm share inevitably falls, the goal is to make farmers owners of the value moving off the farm, since that is where future, better-paying jobs will be.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. You are the District Collector of a district chosen for tomato under One District One Product. Farmers dump tomatoes during gluts. What would you do?

Approach: I would work with the PMFME district resource persons to set up small processing units for purée, dehydrated tomato and sauces, owned by FPOs or women's self-help groups, so that surplus has an outlet. Primary infrastructure such as grading and cold storage near the fields would be prioritised through the agro-processing cluster and cold chain components of Kisan SAMPADA. I would connect FPOs with food-service buyers and institutional kitchens in nearby cities for assured contracts. Success would be measured by the reduction in distress sales during the next glut.

Q2. As Secretary, Food Processing Industries, how would you use the IFPRI estimates in policy?

Approach: I would ask the National Statistics Office and the authors to help institutionalise a regular farm-share series based on the supply-use tables, so that the Ministry has a baseline. I would then set scheme outcomes in terms of value captured by farmers, for example the share of FPO revenue from processed products. Schemes that fund only capacity, without farmer linkage, would be redesigned to reward procurement from FPOs. The data would also correct misplaced debates that treat every intermediary as exploitative.

Q3. An interview board asks: are middlemen the main reason Indian farmers are poor?

Approach: The evidence does not support that as a general rule. India's farm share of at-home food spending is about 57.8%, higher than in most countries, so intermediaries do not take an unusually large cut on average. Farmers' poverty comes mostly from small holdings, low productivity, price volatility and rising input costs. Intermediaries do extract rents where markets are thin or cartelised, so competition through e-NAM, private markets and FPOs is valuable. But removing the trader without replacing his storage, credit and transport functions can leave farmers worse off.

4. International Relations

The United Nations is where the world still goes to talk, and this week it is plain that it is no longer where the world decides. An American President uses the General Assembly to threaten a member state with annihilation, a new club of 'non-superpowers' forms because the Security Council cannot act, and the two technology giants take their AI rules to a bilateral room in Washington. India's answer across all four stories is the same: join every table it can, build coalitions issue by issue, and guard its own memory and its own interests. Even a 108-year-old cavalry charge at Haifa turns out to be a question about how India balances Israel and Palestine today.

4.1 Trump Tells the UNGA He Must Choose Between an Iran Deal and 'Annihilation'; Hormuz Stays Disrupted

THE NEWS United Nations, New York. U.S. President Donald Trump told the 81st session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on Tuesday, September 22, that he had "a big decision to make": a deal that lets Iran "rebuild and create a far greater country", or to "annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly". In a 37-minute speech he urged "all nations" to enforce Iran's "complete economic isolation", yet predicted a deal "right after the election", meaning the November 3 U.S. midterms, in which his Republican Party risks losing Congress, The Hindu notes, partly because of high fuel prices. The war began in late February with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran, which Washington named "Operation Epic Fury"; an interim agreement collapsed in July, weeks after Mr. Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed it. Iran has since fired on commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea passage through which one-fifth of the world's hydrocarbons passed before the war, and demands that it approve passage; the U.S. maintains a counter-blockade of Iranian ports. A senior Iranian official told Reuters that Iran could reopen Hormuz "within days" if the U.S. lifts its blockade, called the UNGA a "golden opportunity", and said Iran had sent a proposal through mediators on September 16. Mr. Pezeshkian, due to speak on Wednesday, is the highest-ranking Iranian official on American soil since the war began; his communications team was denied visas, which Tehran called "hostile". Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said all Iranian airlines "will be shut down around the world", threatening foreign firms that service them with secondary sanctions, that is, penalties on third-country companies. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis seized the country's entire Red Sea coastline this month and aim to control the Bab el-Mandeb strait; the UN says refugees fleeing to Djibouti have reached 10,000. The Houthis accuse Saudi strikes of killing nine prison detainees in northwest Yemen, six civilians in Mokha and two in Al-Jawf, and British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has offered Saudi Arabia aerial refuelling. Saudi Arabia restarted its East-West pipeline, shut by drones on September 13, which reroutes about 4 million barrels a day, around 4% of global supply, to the Red Sea port of Yanbu; Brent fell by more than \$2. On the sidelines, Mr. Trump, Denmark and Greenland signed a pact allowing a larger U.S. military presence on Greenland while keeping it under Danish control, even if it becomes independent. For India, the third-largest crude importer, the Indian basket stood at \$117.36 a barrel on September 21 and the rupee at ₹95.59 to the dollar. Syllabus: GS2, effect of other countries' policies on India's interests; GS3, energy security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February ('Operation Epic Fury') → Iran fires on ships and demands approval for passage through Hormuz; the U.S. imposes a counter-blockade on Iranian ports → an interim deal signed by the two Presidents collapses in July → the Houthis take Yemen's Red Sea coast and drones shut Saudi Arabia's bypass pipeline on September 13 → at the UNGA, Mr. Trump demands Iran's complete economic isolation while promising a deal after the November 3 midterms

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are the two doors of West Asian oil, and the Saudi pipeline is the side door** — The Strait of Hormuz lies between Iran to the north and the Musandam peninsula of Oman to the south, and joins the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The Bab el-Mandeb lies between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea on the Horn of Africa, and joins the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden; the Red Sea leads north to the Suez Canal and Europe. Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline carries crude from its eastern fields across the peninsula to Yanbu on the Red Sea, which is why it is the main route around a closed Hormuz. A Houthi presence at Bab el-Mandeb therefore threatens not only Red Sea shipping but also the very bypass built to escape Hormuz.
- The General Assembly speaks for every member but binds none** — The General

Assembly is set up under Chapter IV (Articles 9 to 22) of the UN Charter; each member has one vote, and decisions on 'important questions' such as budgets and elections need a two-thirds majority of members present and voting (Article 18). Its resolutions are recommendations, except on internal matters such as the budget under Article 17. The annual General Debate opens each September, and by long convention Brazil speaks first and the host country, the United States, second. The Secretary-General is appointed by the Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council under Article 97; António Guterres took office on January 1, 2017, and his second term ends this year. The Uniting for Peace resolution 377 (1950) lets the Assembly take up a threat to peace when the Council is blocked by a veto.

3. **Secondary sanctions reach India even when India is not the target** — Primary sanctions bar a country's own citizens and companies from dealing with a target; secondary sanctions threaten third-country firms that do business with the target, usually by cutting them off from the U.S. market and the dollar system. After the U.S. withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, in May 2018 and ended waivers in 2019, India stopped importing Iranian crude. India's connectivity bets in Iran are the Chabahar port in Sistan-Baluchestan province on the Gulf of Oman, where India signed a ten-year contract to operate the Shahid Beheshti terminal in May 2024, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), agreed by India, Iran and Russia in 2000. Every tightening of Iran sanctions therefore tests India's ability to keep these projects alive.
4. **Greenland is autonomous, Danish and strategically indispensable to the U.S.** — Greenland, the world's largest island, is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark; it got home rule in 1979, and the Self-Government Act of 2009 recognises Greenlanders as a people with the right to self-determination, including independence. A 1951 U.S.-Denmark defence agreement governs American bases there, including the Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule) used for missile warning. Denmark is a founding member of NATO (1949), whose Article 5 treats an attack on one as an attack on all. The Arctic Council, set up by the Ottawa Declaration of 1996, has eight Arctic states as members; India has been an observer since 2013, runs the Himadri research station at Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard (Norway) since 2008, and released its Arctic Policy in 2022.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **GS2 asks how other countries' policies affect India's interests** — The syllabus line 'effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora' fits this story exactly: a U.S. demand for Iran's isolation, a Gulf war and a Red Sea blockade all land on India's fuel bill, its shipping and its workers in the Gulf. The 2017 GS2 paper asked candidates to analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries; the same question today would be answered through Hormuz, the Saudi bypass pipeline and Chabahar.
2. **Prelims keeps returning to maps, straits and chokepoints** — Map-based questions on straits, the countries bordering the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and the location of ports such as Chabahar, Yanbu and Djibouti are a staple. The Arctic has also entered the paper through questions on the Arctic Council and India's research stations. A student who can place Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Musandam and Greenland on a blank map has covered most of the Prelims risk from this story.
3. **GS4 and the essay test the ethics of coercion** — A head of state threatening to 'annihilate' another member state from the UN podium is a ready example for questions on the use of force, the limits of sanctions and the humanitarian cost of blockades. The 10,000 refugees reaching Djibouti and the reported civilian deaths in Yemen give the human side that examiners reward.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and lies

between Iran and the Musandam peninsula of Oman.

- The Bab el-Mandeb strait connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and lies between Yemen and the Horn of Africa states of Djibouti and Eritrea.
- The Houthi movement of Yemen, formally called Ansar Allah, is rooted in the Zaidi Shia community of northern Yemen.
- Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark; its Self-Government Act of 2009 recognises the right of Greenlanders to self-determination.
- India has been an observer at the Arctic Council since 2013 and has operated the Himadri research station at Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard, Norway, since 2008.
- The International North-South Transport Corridor was agreed in 2000 by India, Iran and Russia; Chabahar port lies in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province on the Gulf of Oman.

ANALYSIS

1. Mr. Trump's deadline is a domestic one, and that is the most hopeful fact for India —

The papers tie the promised deal to the November 3 midterms, and The Hindu links the Republican Party's danger to high fuel prices caused by the war. When the world's most powerful leader needs cheaper petrol before a vote, the pressure for a settlement is built into the calendar. That matters more than the rhetoric of annihilation, which is aimed as much at Tehran's negotiators as at American voters. The counter-view is serious: Mr. Trump himself says he is 'not running', a President can escalate to look strong, and the interim deal of July collapsed even after both Presidents signed it. India should therefore plan for a deal but insure against a longer war.

2. 'Complete economic isolation' is a demand that falls more heavily on India than on Europe —

Europe has largely stopped buying Iranian and Russian oil; India, the third-largest crude importer and the second-biggest buyer of Russian crude according to The Hindu, has not stopped buying Russian oil. Last week Mr. Trump signed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, which allows tariffs of up to 100% on the top five importers of Russian oil, and now Mr. Bessent threatens secondary sanctions on anyone servicing Iranian airlines. The Indian basket at \$117.36 a barrel and a rupee at ₹95.59 to the dollar show how expensive the war already is for Indian households. The one opening is that the new law allows sanctions to be suspended in the American national interest, which gives Indian negotiators something to bargain for rather than simply comply with.

3. Geography, not diplomacy, is setting the oil price, and a U.S.-Iran deal may not reopen the Red Sea —

Brent fell more than \$2 the moment Saudi Arabia restarted a single pipeline, which shows how much of the market's fear is about routes rather than supply. But that pipeline ends at Yanbu on the Red Sea, where the Houthis now hold the Yemeni coast and aim at Bab el-Mandeb. An Indian Express explainer quotes MP-IDSA's Prasanta Kumar Pradhan and notes that the Houthis act with substantial operational freedom, so Iranian pledges to reduce tensions do not guarantee Houthi restraint. For India, whose trade with Europe normally passes through the Red Sea and Suez, a Hormuz deal without a Yemen settlement would still leave freight and insurance costs high.

4. The Qatari proposal is the only idea on the table that addresses the cause —

Blockades and counter-blockades treat the symptom; a common security architecture bringing Iran and the Arab Gulf states together addresses why each fears the other. Qatar's Prime Minister put it plainly: lasting security cannot rest on cycles of escalation

	or on 'arrangements that leave any state permanently exposed to insecurity'. India has close ties with Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar at once, which makes it one of the few large powers with no reason to prefer one side's security over the other's. The objection is that the Gulf states, the papers note, are wary of giving Iran too much influence, and no regional scheme survives without American acceptance. 5. Greenland shows that allies can bargain down a sovereignty demand, but only together — Mr. Trump wanted Greenland as U.S. territory; he has signed for a larger military presence instead, with Danish control intact and the pact valid even if Greenland chooses independence. That outcome followed months of quiet negotiation, a Danish Prime Minister warning that a takeover would end the Atlantic alliance, and EU partners stepping up exercises. The lesson for middle powers such as India is that coalitions can convert a territorial demand into a basing agreement. The caution is that Mr. Trump did not answer whether acquisition is off the table, so the principle of territorial integrity, which India itself invokes, has been protected by bargaining, not settled.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The war in West Asia has turned the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb into instruments of coercion. Examine the implications of this for India's energy security and strategic autonomy, and suggest a policy response. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the facts of September 22: Mr. Trump's UNGA call for Iran's 'complete economic isolation', the U.S. counter-blockade, Iran's control of passage through Hormuz, which carried one-fifth of world hydrocarbons before the war, and the Houthi seizure of Yemen's Red Sea coast. 2. Body — energy security — Explain India's exposure as the third-largest crude importer: the Indian basket at \$117.36 a barrel, the rupee at ₹95.59, and the fragility of the Saudi East-West pipeline to Yanbu. Add the risk to shipping through the Red Sea and Suez, and to Indian workers across the Gulf. 3. Body — strategic autonomy — Discuss the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act with tariffs of up to 100%, Mr. Bessent's secondary sanctions threat, and the effect on Chabahar and the INSTC. Contrast India's refusal to join unilateral isolation with its need for U.S. trade and technology. 4. Body — policy response — Suggest diversification of crude sources, larger strategic petroleum reserves, naval escort and information-sharing for Indian-flagged ships, diplomatic support for the Qatari regional security proposal, and quiet negotiation for exemptions under the U.S. law's national-interest clause. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that chokepoint coercion cannot be escaped by any single importer, so India's safety lies in diversified supply, reserves and a regional settlement that includes Iran and the Gulf states alike.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Joint Secretary (Gulf) in the Ministry of External Affairs. The Houthis now hold Yemen's Red Sea coast and Saudi Arabia is under attack. What do you do first? Approach: I would update the evacuation plan for Indian nationals in Yemen, southern Saudi Arabia and Djibouti, with the Navy and Air Force briefed on routes and staging points. I would ask missions to register Indians and publish helplines, since panic spreads faster than facts. I would coordinate with the Directorate General of Shipping on advisories for Indian seafarers crossing the Red Sea. Diplomatically, I would keep channels open with Riyadh, Tehran and, through intermediaries, with parties on the ground, because evacuation needs safe passage from all sides. Q2. As Secretary, Petroleum and Natural Gas, how would you protect consumers if Hormuz stays disrupted for another six months?

Approach: I would lock in term contracts from suppliers whose cargo does not pass through Hormuz, and prioritise the Saudi Red Sea route while it works. Strategic reserves should be drawn down only against a clear trigger and refilled when prices dip. I would coordinate with the Finance Ministry on how much of the price shock to pass on, since a sudden jump hurts transport and farm costs. Transparent public communication on stocks prevents hoarding and rumour.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India join the U.S. call for the complete economic isolation of Iran?

Approach: India should not join unilateral isolation, because it recognises only sanctions mandated by the UN Security Council and because Iran is central to its connectivity through Chabahar and the INSTC. Isolating a country of Iran's size also rarely produces a settlement; it tends to harden the regime and hurt citizens. At the same time India cannot ignore U.S. secondary sanctions, so it must negotiate exemptions and reduce exposure quietly. The honest answer is that India's interest is a negotiated end to the war, not the victory of either side.

4.2 Jaishankar Co-Chairs First P4M Summit, Warns of '4F' Crisis as Tajikistan Contests India's UNSC Bid

THE NEWS United Nations, New York. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday, September 21, co-chaired the first-ever 'Partners for Multilateralism, International Law, Peace & Prosperity' (P4M) Summit, held on the margins of the high-level week of the 81st UN General Assembly. The Hindu reports that India joined the grouping, a 'non-superpower' initiative originally launched by the European Union, Brazil, Canada and Kenya, and became an additional co-sponsor along with Australia and Barbados; the Indian Express lists the co-sponsors as Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, the EU and Kenya, and says European Council President António Costa, Kenyan President William Ruto, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley joined Mr. Jaishankar. Multilateralism means countries solving shared problems through common rules and institutions such as the UN, rather than by power alone. Mr. Jaishankar said the global order is "under stress": a long-expected rebalancing has been given "an entirely different character" by "extreme competition, geopolitical tensions and actual conflicts". He named a "'4F' crisis of fuel, food, fertilizer and finance" that "cannot be left to itself", called for "frameworks and guardrails" and said that "where there is a threat of chokepoint dominance and disruption, de-risking and diversifying must be encouraged". "Reformed multilateralism is thus essential," he said, with "more participative deliberations and more transparent decision-making". The Indian Express notes the remarks came days after Mr. Trump signed the Russia sanctions law allowing tariffs of up to 100% on countries, including India and China, that buy Russian oil and gas. Top of his agenda, The Hindu reports, is support for India's bid for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat for 2028-2029, to be decided in next year's election; Tajikistan has also launched its candidature for the Asia-Pacific seat, so a meeting with Tajik Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin is being watched. He met the Foreign Ministers of France, Ecuador, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Moldova and Switzerland and the President of Nauru, and on Tuesday the 33-member Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). At the first India-Visegrad meeting, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia backed India as a permanent UNSC member, Slovak Foreign Minister Juraj Blahar saying India "must be at the table". Ukraine's Andrii Sybiha said restoring freedom of navigation in the Black Sea is "critical for global food security". Mr. Jaishankar addresses the General Debate on Saturday, September 26. In the Indian Express, Pratap Bhanu Mehta argues that this summit calendar puts a floor under crises but may not be making the world safer. Syllabus: GS2, international institutions and India's interests.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Great-power rivalry leaves the 15-member Security Council deeply polarised → wars in Ukraine and West Asia create a fuel, food, fertiliser and finance shock that falls hardest on developing countries → the EU, Brazil, Canada and Kenya launch a 'non-superpower' partnership for multilateralism → India joins as co-sponsor and co-chairs the first P4M Summit at the 81st UNGA → the same week India lobbies the Visegrad Group, CELAC and others for a 2028-29 Council seat that Tajikistan now contests

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. Article 23 fixes the Security Council at 15 members, and only ten seats are ever

contested — Article 23 of the UN Charter provides for five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) and ten non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, with retiring members not eligible for immediate re-election. The Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965. Five non-permanent members are elected every year, and each needs a two-thirds majority of Assembly members present and voting, so a contested seat can go to several rounds. Seats are distributed among regional groups, and India contests from the Asia-Pacific Group. India has served eight terms, most recently in 2021-22.

2. Article 27 gives the veto, and Article 108 lets the veto-holders block their own reform

— Under Article 27, procedural decisions need nine votes, while all other decisions need nine votes including the concurring votes of the permanent members, which is the veto; by practice, an abstention by a permanent member is not treated as a veto. Any change to the Council's composition requires a Charter amendment under Article 108: adoption by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members. This is why every reform campaign, however popular in the Assembly, eventually meets the consent of the countries whose privilege it would dilute.

3. Reform is stuck between three camps — The G4 — Brazil, Germany, India and Japan — support one another's claims to permanent seats. The Uniting for Consensus group, which includes Italy, Pakistan, Argentina, South Korea and Turkey, opposes new permanent seats and prefers more elected ones. The African Union's Ezulwini Consensus (2005) demands two permanent seats for Africa, with the veto as long as it exists, and five non-permanent seats. Negotiations run in the General Assembly's Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process, which began in 2009 and still has no agreed negotiating text.

4. Mehta's argument rests on two classic theories of international order — Hegemonic stability theory, associated with Charles Kindleberger and Robert Gilpin, holds that an open world order needs a dominant power willing to bear the cost of providing public goods such as stable money and open sea lanes. The collective action problem, set out by Mancur Olson in 1965, explains why actors who all gain from a common good still fail to provide it, since each prefers others to bear the cost. Liberal institutionalists such as Robert Keohane argue that institutions can sustain cooperation even after hegemony declines, by lowering the cost of trust. Mehta's claim that there are 'no hegemons' and that states 'can constrain each other' but 'cannot produce collective action' sits squarely in this debate.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. The GS2 syllabus names international institutions, their structure and mandate — UPSC asked in 2015 about the impediments India faces in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the Security Council, and the theme returns in questions on India's multilateral diplomacy. The P4M summit, the Visegrad endorsement and the Tajik challenge give a fresh answer frame: the reform India wants, the coalitions it builds, and the elections it still has to win meanwhile.

2. Prelims tests Charter articles and the membership of groupings — Questions have covered the composition of the Security Council, the length of non-permanent terms, and the membership of groupings such as the G4, BRICS and SCO. The Visegrad Group and CELAC are natural candidates for the next such question, as is the Article 108 amendment procedure.

3. Essay and GS2 reward a view on multilateralism itself — Essay topics on global governance and the relevance of the UN are common. Mehta's argument that summits keep a floor under crises without solving them, set against Mr. Jaishankar's call for issue-based coalitions of the like-minded, gives a student a genuine debate rather than

	a list of institutions.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Article 23 of the UN Charter, the Security Council has 15 members: five permanent and ten non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, with retiring members not eligible for immediate re-election. ● Election of a non-permanent member of the Security Council requires a two-thirds majority of General Assembly members present and voting. ● Under Article 108 of the UN Charter, an amendment comes 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 Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 members by a Charter amendment that came into force in 1965. ● The Visegrad Group, formed in 1991, comprises the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. ● The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), founded in 2011, has 33 member states and does not include the United States or Canada. ● The G4 countries seeking permanent membership of the Security Council are Brazil, Germany, India and Japan.
ANALYSIS	1. The '4F' formula is India writing the Global South's agenda into a Western-leaning club — Half of P4M's sponsors — the EU, Canada and Australia — are close American allies, while Brazil, Kenya and Barbados speak for the developing world. Fuel, food, fertiliser and finance are exactly the costs that wars in Ukraine and West Asia impose on poorer countries, and 'chokepoint dominance' is a phrase that fits Hormuz and the Black Sea alike. By naming them, Mr. Jaishankar positions India as the bridge between the two halves of the grouping. The risk is that such formulas become slogans; the test is whether P4M produces anything concrete on fertiliser supply or debt relief. 2. Joining a 'non-superpower' group is a hedge, not a choice of camp — India joined P4M days after the U.S. gave itself power to impose tariffs of up to 100% on buyers of Russian oil, and while it remains in BRICS, the SCO and the Quad. Membership of a middle-power forum signals that India will not be forced into either American or Chinese preferences. It also costs little, since P4M has no treaty obligations. The counter-view, which Mehta presses, is that middle-power groups can talk but cannot enforce, so the hedge buys diplomatic space without buying security. 3. Tajikistan's candidature turns a formality into a campaign India must not take for granted — India's 2021-22 candidature was endorsed unanimously by the Asia-Pacific Group and ran unopposed, but an open contest needs two-thirds of the Assembly and can go to repeated rounds. India has lost before, to Japan in 1996, and a split Assembly once forced Italy and the Netherlands to divide the 2017-18 term. Small states vote as a bloc on solidarity, which is why Mr. Jaishankar is meeting CELAC and the President of Nauru. The best argument for India remains its record: eight terms and a large contribution to UN peacekeeping. 4. Endorsements of India's permanent seat are cheap until Article 108 is faced — The Visegrad backing is welcome, and Mr. Blinar's line that India 'must be at the table' will be quoted often. But permanent membership needs ratification by all five permanent members, and China has never endorsed India's claim. Even rhetoric can mislead: Turkey's President Erdogan told the Assembly that a system in which 190-plus countries are 'subject to the whims of five countries' is unfair, yet Turkey belongs to the Uniting for Consensus group that opposes new permanent seats. Students should read reform speeches for what they oppose as well as what they condemn.

	5. Mehta is right about the diagnosis and incomplete about the remedy — Mehta argues that none of the systemic wars — Russia-Ukraine, America-Iran, Iran-Saudi, Israel and its neighbours — has a bargaining solution within current ideas of territory, power and prestige, and he ends with Musil's line that 'keeping what we have leads to war'. That is a fair warning against confusing the pageantry of summits with progress. But in a world without a hegemon, issue-based coalitions of the kind Mr. Jaishankar describes — the 'like-minded' coming together on a 'compelling cause' — may be the only collective action on offer. Guterres, in his final address, told superpowers 'their power isn't so super'; the corollary is that middle powers must do more of the organising themselves.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Reformed multilateralism" has become the central theme of India's diplomacy at the United Nations. In the light of new middle-power groupings such as the Partners for Multilateralism, examine whether such coalitions can remedy the deficits of the UN Security Council. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Refer to the first P4M Summit on the margins of the 81st UNGA, co-chaired by India with Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, the EU and Kenya, and Mr. Jaishankar's call for 'reformed multilateralism' with more participative and transparent decision-making. 2. Body — the deficits — Describe the Council's polarisation among its five veto-holders, the 1945 composition frozen since the 1965 enlargement, and the Article 108 barrier. Use Erdogan's '190 countries subject to five' line and the wars in Ukraine and West Asia as evidence. 3. Body — what coalitions can do — Argue that middle-power coalitions can set agendas (the '4F' crisis of fuel, food, fertiliser and finance), build norms against chokepoint coercion, and create voting blocs for reform and for elections such as India's 2028-29 bid. Cite the Visegrad endorsement and outreach to CELAC. 4. Body — limits — Note that such groups lack enforcement, cannot override the veto, and face the collective action problem Mehta describes. Mention competing reform camps: the G4, Uniting for Consensus and the Ezulwini Consensus. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that coalitions can supplement but not substitute Council reform; India should use them to build the two-thirds majorities it needs while keeping its campaign for a permanent seat alive.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are India's Permanent Representative in New York. Tajikistan has entered the race for the 2028-29 seat. How do you run the campaign? Approach: I would map every Assembly vote by region and by the issues each country cares about, since a two-thirds majority is won capital by capital. Small island states, Africa and Latin America need attention through development partnerships and peacekeeping cooperation, not just requests for votes. I would keep relations with Tajikistan cordial, because a bitter contest within the Asia-Pacific Group hurts both. A clear statement of what India will do on the Council, such as on terrorism, peacekeeping and the '4F' crisis, persuades more than claims of size. Q2. An interview board asks: is UN Security Council reform realistic in your lifetime? Approach: A Charter amendment needs all five permanent members to ratify, so reform of permanent membership is unlikely soon. But partial change is possible: more elected seats, working-method reforms and restraint on the veto in mass-atrocity situations have wider support. India should pursue the achievable while keeping its larger claim alive. Meanwhile, the credibility India builds as an elected member and through groups like P4M is itself part of the case.

Q3. As a Joint Secretary handling multilateral economic issues, how would you turn the '4F' speech into policy?

Approach: I would identify one deliverable per 'F': joint stockholding or supply assurances for fertiliser, a food-corridor proposal building on the Black Sea concerns raised by Ukraine, energy-route diversification, and support for debt restructuring for vulnerable countries. Each should be offered to P4M partners with India's own contribution named. I would measure success by agreements signed and shipments delivered, not communiqués. Without deliverables, the formula will be forgotten by the next Assembly.

4.3 Raja Mohan: As Xi and Trump Open an AI Dialogue, India Faces Three Hard Questions

THE NEWS New Delhi and Washington. Chinese President Xi Jinping meets U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on Thursday, September 24, to begin a formal bilateral dialogue on artificial intelligence (AI) and its risks, C. Raja Mohan writes in his 'Raja Mandala' column in the Indian Express. The meeting comes barely 10 days after Mr. Xi used the Delhi BRICS summit to offer a Chinese vision of AI cooperation: he invited BRICS members to join the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO), launched by China in Shanghai this summer, proposed an open-source AI community for the forum, and presented China as the champion of developing countries seeking affordable, open-source AI, whose designs anyone may use and adapt. In Washington, Raja Mohan argues, the talk will be about the other side of AI: the dangers of powerful 'frontier' models, meaning the most advanced systems, and the need to prevent accidents, miscalculation and misuse. It is, he notes, their third summit in under 10 months. He traces the dialogue to Joe Biden and Mr. Xi's meeting at Woodside, California, in November 2023; a year later at Lima the two affirmed that humans, not AI, must control decisions on the use of nuclear weapons. Under Mr. Trump, AI diplomacy has become more transactional, entangled with chips, export controls, rare earths and tariffs; when the two met in Beijing in May they discussed AI 'guardrails' but no arrangement followed. After talks in New York last weekend between Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng, Washington said the sides considered a standing AI dialogue and a notification system for incidents with national-security consequences. Raja Mohan poses three questions for India: how to navigate the contest while being part of the U.S.-led Pax Silica initiative on technology and supply chains, staying out of WAICO yet sitting in a China-dominated BRICS; how to compete when China can offer the Global South a wider technology package; and whether U.S.-China 'strategic stability' could become discriminatory rules for everyone else, as the nuclear order did. His prescription: trusted partners abroad, indigenous capability at home. The same day, a PTI report says Beijing called Taiwan a "red line" ahead of Mr. Xi's three-day visit, the leaders' second meeting since May, and is expected to oppose a proposed \$11 billion U.S. arms package for Taiwan that Mr. Trump has yet to approve. At the UNGA, ahead of a Security Council meeting on AI and international security, Mr. Trump said he would not "stifle" a technology "bigger than Industrial Revolution". Syllabus: GS2, effect of great-power policies on India; GS3, science and technology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Biden and Xi open a tentative AI channel at Woodside in November 2023 → at Lima a year later they affirm that humans, not AI, control nuclear-use decisions → under Mr. Trump, AI safety becomes entangled with chips, export controls, rare earths and tariffs, and the May Beijing summit ends without an arrangement → Mr. Xi pitches WAICO and open-source AI to the Global South at the Delhi BRICS summit → Mr. Xi and Mr. Trump meet in Washington to launch a formal AI dialogue, leaving India to ask whose rules it will live under

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The nuclear order is the precedent that makes India wary of great-power technology rules** — The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was opened for signature in 1968 and entered into force in 1970; it defines a nuclear-weapon state as one that manufactured and exploded a nuclear device before January 1, 1967, which froze the club at five. India refused to sign, calling the treaty discriminatory. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) was formed in 1974 after India's first nuclear test at Pokhran to restrict nuclear exports, and only in September 2008 did it grant India a special waiver following the India-U.S. civil nuclear initiative. This is the history Raja Mohan invokes

	when he warns that a U.S.-China ‘strategic stability’ on AI could harden into controls against others. 2. India has since joined most export-control regimes, but not the NSG — India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2016, the Wassenaar Arrangement on conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies in December 2017, and the Australia Group on chemical and biological weapons in January 2018. These regimes are informal groupings of supplier states that coordinate national export controls; they are not treaties. NSG membership still requires consensus, and China has blocked India’s entry by insisting on criteria for states outside the NPT. Membership matters because advanced AI chips are increasingly treated as dual-use goods under export controls. 3. Rivals have agreed rules before, and those rules bound everyone else — After the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S. and the Soviet Union set up a direct communication link, the ‘hotline’, in 1963. The Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 banned nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space and under water but not underground; India signed it in 1963. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 barred nuclear weapons in orbit, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and SALT I followed in 1972. The incident-notification system now being discussed by Washington and Beijing belongs to the same family of crisis-management tools. 4. India’s own AI and chip architecture, and its Taiwan position — The Union Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission in March 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore over five years, for public compute capacity, indigenous foundation models, datasets and skills. The India Semiconductor Mission was set up in December 2021 under a ₹76,000 crore programme to attract chip and display manufacturing. On Taiwan, India follows a ‘one China’ practice and has no diplomatic relations with Taipei, but has maintained the India-Taipei Association since 1995 for trade and cultural ties. The U.S. Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 commits Washington to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character, which is the legal basis of the \$11 billion package Beijing opposes.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 and GS3 now meet on technology geopolitics — The GS2 line on the ‘effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India’s interests’ now includes export controls, chip supply chains and AI rules, while GS3 covers ‘awareness in the fields of IT, computers and robotics’. Recent papers have asked about applications of AI; the next step is questions on AI governance and India’s place in it, for which this column is a ready frame. 2. Prelims has asked about export-control regimes and treaties — India’s membership of the MTCR, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group, and its non-membership of the NSG, have been tested, as have the provisions of the NPT and the test ban treaties. The IndiaAI Mission and the India Semiconductor Mission, with their parent ministries and outlays, are likely scheme questions. 3. Interviews probe strategic autonomy in practice — Boards often ask whether India can be in BRICS and the Quad at once. Raja Mohan’s three questions give a candidate a precise answer: India is inside the U.S.-led Pax Silica, outside China’s WAICO, and still has to manage China-shaped BRICS rhetoric.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under the NPT, a nuclear-weapon state is one that manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967. ● The Nuclear Suppliers Group was formed in 1974 after India’s first nuclear test, and granted India a special waiver in September 2008. ● India is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (2016), the Wassenaar Arrangement (2017) and the Australia Group (2018), but not of the

	Nuclear Suppliers Group. ● The Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 prohibits nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water, but not underground. ● The IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024, has an outlay of ₹10,371.92 crore over five years. ● The U.S. Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 provides for the supply of defensive arms to Taiwan after Washington's recognition of the People's Republic of China.
ANALYSIS	1. Mr. Xi's road from Delhi to Washington exposes the limits of BRICS's AI rhetoric — In Delhi, Mr. Xi spoke of openness, access and diffusion; in Washington he will negotiate the rules of the frontier with the only other power that has one. Raja Mohan's point is that multipolar language does not change the fact that technological power is bipolar. For India, which hosted the BRICS summit, this is uncomfortable: a forum it chaired became a platform for China's AI offer to the Global South. The counter-view is that BRICS still gives India a seat where China's proposals can be diluted, which it could not do from outside. 2. An incident-notification channel is the right first step, and India needs one of its own — In a crisis, as Raja Mohan notes, the first need is not a grand bargain but the ability to establish what happened, whether it was deliberate, and who is responsible. That is the logic of the 1963 hotline, and it applies to AI-enabled systems that may one day misread a signal on a disputed border. India faces China along the Line of Actual Control and Pakistan across the Line of Control, yet no AI-specific notification arrangement exists with either. The objection is that confidence-building with China has eroded since the 2020 clashes in eastern Ladakh; but that is precisely why low-cost technical channels are worth proposing. 3. The 'condominium' fear is real, but U.S.-China rivalry is also India's leverage — The worry is that two powers that agree on strategic stability may also agree on who else gets advanced chips and models, as the NPT once divided the world into haves and have-nots. Raja Mohan himself offers the counterweight: competition for markets and for partners limits such collusion and creates room for emerging powers. The difference from the 1970s is that India is now inside a U.S.-led technology arrangement, Pax Silica, rather than outside every club. The risk flips: membership may bring its own compliance demands, such as aligning with American export controls, which India must negotiate rather than assume. 4. The Global South technology package is where India is losing ground — India's emphasis on AI for developing societies resonated at the Delhi AI summit earlier this year, but China can bundle compute, infrastructure, hardware and advanced models. India's strongest export is digital public infrastructure, such as Aadhaar-based identity and UPI payments, which many countries admire. Pairing that infrastructure with affordable AI services is India's natural offer. The weakness is scale of compute and capital; without them, India offers blueprints while China offers finished systems. 5. Capability, not declarations, will decide India's place, and no one is going to slow the race — Mr. Trump's statement at the UNGA that he will not 'stifle' AI shows that the U.S. will not trade speed for safety, and Mehta notes on the same page that race incentives arrive exactly when the technology needs slowing. A global safety regime is therefore unlikely soon, and rules will be written by those with frontier capability. That makes the IndiaAI Mission and the India Semiconductor Mission strategic, not merely industrial, programmes. Raja Mohan's prescription — trusted partners abroad, indigenous strength at home — is sound, but the gap he admits with America and China means the partnerships will carry most of the weight for years.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Artificial intelligence has become a great-power game." In the context of the emerging

	U.S.–China dialogue on AI, discuss the challenges this poses for India and suggest a strategy that preserves India’s strategic autonomy. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State that Mr. Xi and Mr. Trump are launching a formal AI dialogue in Washington about 10 days after Mr. Xi offered WAICO and an open-source AI community at the Delhi BRICS summit, building on the Woodside (2023) and Lima (2024) understandings. 2. Body — why it matters — Explain the risk agenda: frontier models, military uses, accidents and miscalculation, and the proposed incident-notification system discussed by Mr. Bessent and He Lifeng. Draw the Cold War parallel of the 1963 hotline and test ban treaty. 3. Body — India’s three challenges — Use Raja Mohan’s framework: navigating the contest while in Pax Silica and BRICS but outside WAICO; competing with China’s wider technology package for the Global South; and the danger of a discriminatory ‘AI condominium’, with the NPT and NSG history as evidence. 4. Body — strategy — Recommend indigenous capability through the IndiaAI Mission and the India Semiconductor Mission, partnerships with trusted states, pairing digital public infrastructure with AI for the Global South, and pushing for inclusive, non-discriminatory AI governance at the UN, including at the Security Council’s AI debate. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India should welcome any U.S.–China step that reduces AI risk, while ensuring that rules on safety do not become rules on access; autonomy will follow capability.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and IT. The U.S. and China may agree AI safety norms that later restrict chip exports. How do you prepare? Approach: I would first map India’s dependence on imported high-end chips for the IndiaAI compute programme and build a reserve of capacity through long-term contracts with trusted suppliers. I would press, with the Ministry of External Affairs, for India to be consulted on any norms that affect access, citing our membership of export-control regimes as proof of responsible behaviour. I would accelerate domestic design and packaging under the India Semiconductor Mission. And I would make sure Indian safety standards are credible, so that we can argue for access on the basis of our own record. Q2. An interview board asks: should India join China’s World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation? Approach: Not now. India has enduring security concerns with China, and joining a China-led body on a strategic technology would complicate its place in U.S.-led supply-chain arrangements. But India should not dismiss the idea of AI access for developing countries; it should offer its own model, built on digital public infrastructure and open standards. Keeping out of WAICO while engaging on AI in BRICS and the UN is consistent with strategic autonomy. Q3. As a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs dealing with disarmament, what would you propose at the Security Council’s debate on AI and international security? Approach: I would propose that human control over decisions to use nuclear weapons, which the U.S. and China affirmed at Lima, be endorsed by all nuclear-armed states. I would argue for incident-notification practices open to all states, not only the two largest. I would stress that safety rules must not become a tool for denying developing countries access to AI. This positions India as a responsible voice that is neither a bystander nor a follower.

4.4 Tharoor Revisits the 1918 Battle of Haifa: Celebrated by India and Israel, Resented by Palestinians

THE NEWS New Delhi. On the 108th anniversary of the Battle of Haifa, fought on September 23, 1918, Shashi Tharoor — the Congress Member of Parliament for Thiruvananthapuram, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and author of 'An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India' — writes in The Hindu that the battle has become “a site of contested memory” for India, Israel and Palestine. In military terms, he writes, it was a small but tactically significant cavalry action in the final phase of the First World War. The Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers of the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, drawn from the forces of princely states, charged up the slopes of Mount Carmel and overcame principally Ottoman forces; contemporary British war diaries call the action decisive in securing the port city and enabling the Allied advance north to Damascus, and it was one of the last great cavalry charges. More than a million Indians served overseas in that war, from Flanders to Mesopotamia, and over 74,000 died. Tharoor gives each memory its due. For India, celebrating the battle, including renaming a First World War memorial in Delhi 'Teen Murti Haifa Chowk', is historical recovery: proof that Indian soldiers shaped world events before independence. For Israel, the memory of Indian cavalry 'liberating' Haifa is woven into a narrative of gratitude and friendship, with memorials and annual ceremonies; Indian leaders have visited the Haifa memorial. For many Palestinians, the victory helped secure British control of Palestine, the implementation of the Balfour Declaration and the transformations that led to Israel's creation, so it is a story of dispossession; the Palestinian Ambassador to India, Abdullah Mohammed Abu Shawesh, says in a letter to Tharoor that he sees “a clear Israeli effort to link contemporary India with the history of the establishment of Israel”, and calls the soldiers not heroes but “victims” of British colonial exploitation. Tharoor also notes a scholarly quarrel: some Israeli scholars say the Indian role is overstated and credit British and Australian troops, which he reads as partly discomfort at 'owing' much to colonised cavalymen, while Indian military historians cite British war records crediting the Indian cavalry. His conclusion: the soldiers fought with extraordinary courage but under colonial command, and a mature historical consciousness holds both truths. The memory is live: at the UNGA on Tuesday, Turkey's President Erdogan urged countries to recognise a Palestinian state, and The Hindu notes India signed a bilateral investment treaty with Israel in 2025. Syllabus: GS1, modern history and the world wars; GS2, India's West Asia policy.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The Ottoman Empire joins the Central Powers in the First World War → Britain promises a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 → on September 23, 1918, the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers take Haifa from mainly Ottoman forces, helping secure British control of Palestine → the British Mandate ends in 1948 with the creation of Israel and the Palestinian displacement Palestinians call the Nakba → a century later India and Israel commemorate the charge as friendship, while Palestinians see the imperial project it served

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. India's First World War was fought by an army that belonged to an empire —** The Indian Army fought in France and Flanders, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine, Gallipoli and East Africa, and India Gate in New Delhi, designed by Edwin Lutyens and completed in 1931, commemorates Indian soldiers who died in the First World War and the Third Anglo-Afghan War. The Imperial Service Troops were units maintained by princely states and placed at the disposal of the British Indian government for imperial service. At Haifa, the Jodhpur Lancers' commander Major Dalpat Singh was killed and is remembered in India as the 'Hero of Haifa'. The Indian Army marks September 23 as Haifa Day, and the Teen Murti memorial in New Delhi, whose three bronze figures represent the Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore Lancers, was renamed Teen Murti Haifa Chowk in January 2018 during the Israeli Prime Minister's visit.
- 2. Three wartime British promises created the Palestine question —** The Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915-16 encouraged the Sharif of Mecca to believe Arab lands would become independent if the Arabs rose against the Ottomans. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 secretly divided the Ottoman Arab provinces into British and French spheres. The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, a letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, promised British support for 'a national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine while saying nothing should prejudice the rights of existing non-Jewish communities. The League of Nations approved the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922; the UN General Assembly's partition plan, Resolution

	181, followed in 1947, and Israel was established in May 1948, amid the flight and expulsion of Palestinians that they call the Nakba, or catastrophe. 3. India's policy moved from support for Palestine alone to ties with both — India voted against the partition plan in 1947, recognised Israel in 1950, but established full diplomatic relations only in 1992. India recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974, the first non-Arab state to do so, and recognised the State of Palestine in 1988. In 2017, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel, and in 2018 he visited Ramallah separately, an approach often called 'de-hyphenation', meaning relations with each are pursued on their own merits. India's stated position remains support for a negotiated two-state solution. 4. Palestine's status at the UN is part of the live debate — By General Assembly Resolution 67/19 of 2012, Palestine was accorded non-member observer State status at the United Nations; India voted in favour. Full UN membership requires a Security Council recommendation, where a permanent member's veto can block it, followed by a two-thirds vote of the Assembly. Recognition of a state, by contrast, is a decision each country makes for itself, which is why Erdogan urged governments individually to review their positions. The gap between wide recognition and blocked membership is itself an example of the veto problem discussed in the multilateralism debate.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS1 asks about India and the world wars, and GS2 about India and Israel — The GS1 syllabus covers modern Indian history and world history including the world wars and the redrawing of national boundaries, and Haifa joins both. On the GS2 side, the 2018 paper asked whether India's relations with Israel had acquired a depth and diversity that cannot be rolled back. A good answer today must also show how India keeps its Palestinian relationship intact, and Haifa is a vivid illustration of that balance. 2. Prelims tests treaties and declarations with dates — The Balfour Declaration, Sykes-Picot, the League of Nations mandates and UN resolutions on Palestine are standard world history questions. Memorials such as India Gate and the renaming of Teen Murti Haifa Chowk are also fair game in culture and current events questions. 3. Essay and GS4 reward nuance on memory and history — Essay topics on history, memory and identity recur, and Tharoor's formulation — courage can serve causes not chosen by those who display it — is a ready ethical argument. Interview boards ask candidates to weigh competing narratives without taking sides crudely; this story is a model of how to do that.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Battle of Haifa was fought on September 23, 1918, by the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers of the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade, mainly against Ottoman forces. ● The Teen Murti memorial in New Delhi was renamed Teen Murti Haifa Chowk in 2018. ● The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, was a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild supporting a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. ● The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was a secret understanding between Britain and France, with Russian assent, dividing Ottoman Arab territories into spheres of influence. ● India recognised the State of Palestine in 1988 and established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. ● India Gate, designed by Edwin Lutyens, commemorates soldiers of the British

	Indian Army who died in the First World War and the Third Anglo-Afghan War. ● UN General Assembly Resolution 67/19 of 2012 accorded Palestine non-member observer State status.
ANALYSIS	1. Holding 'multiple truths' is the only honest position, and also the most politically costly one — Tharoor's argument is that the soldiers' courage and the empire's purposes are both true, and that choosing one erases the other. That is sound history, but it satisfies no one fully: nationalists want an unambiguous victory, Israeli commemorations want gratitude, and the Palestinian Ambassador wants the soldiers called victims. A government cannot hold a ceremony in three voices. What it can do is keep the commemoration about the soldiers themselves, their regiments and their sacrifice, and leave out claims about what the victory later made possible. 2. Commemoration is diplomacy by other means, and both sides use it — The renaming in Delhi happened during an Israeli prime ministerial visit, and Israel's annual ceremonies and memorials keep the Indian role visible; Tharoor accepts that these reflect a genuine historical connection as well as diplomatic purpose. The Palestinian Ambassador sees in them 'a clear Israeli effort' to link modern India with Israel's founding, which is his interpretation, not an established fact. An Israeli view would reply that gratitude to soldiers who fought and died in the city is ordinary remembrance, not a political claim. Students should present both readings and note that the same act can be sincere and useful at once. 3. The Palestinian critique targets the empire, a critique India's own freedom movement shared — The Palestinian line — 'we did not ask you to liberate us' — questions the imperial project, not the soldiers' bravery, as Tharoor stresses. India's nationalists made a similar argument when the Congress objected in 1939 to India being taken into the Second World War without its consent. Yet calling the soldiers 'victims' also denies them agency, which is exactly what postcolonial historians try to restore; many chose to serve for pay, honour or regimental tradition. The balanced view is that they were brave men in an unequal system, neither simply heroes of Zionism nor passive victims. 4. The quarrel over credit shows how imperial memory ranked soldiers by race — Tharoor reports that some Israeli scholars credit British and Australian troops and suggests this partly reflects discomfort at 'owing' much to colonised brown-skinned cavalymen; that is his reading and should be attributed as such. Indian military historians answer with British war records that credit the Indian cavalry with the breakthrough, and Tharoor cites contemporary British war diaries calling the action decisive. Recovering the Indian role is therefore legitimate historiography, not mere nationalism. The caution is that over-claiming serves present politics too, whether the aim is Indian pride or India-Israel friendship. 5. For policy, the memory should stay Indian, and the Palestine position should stay principled — India's ties with Israel run deep, from defence to the bilateral investment treaty of 2025 that The Hindu mentions today. India also recognised Palestine in 1988 and supports a two-state solution, while at the UNGA Erdogan is pressing states to recognise Palestine and noting that Mahmoud Abbas could not attend for a second year. India can honour Haifa Day as a chapter of its own military history without adopting either side's account of 1948. That keeps the memory from becoming a vote in a present-day dispute, which is the practical meaning of Tharoor's 'mature historical consciousness'.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	The Battle of Haifa (1918) is commemorated in India and Israel but viewed very differently by Palestinians. Discuss how colonial-era military history shapes contemporary diplomacy, with reference to India's relations with Israel and Palestine. (15 marks, 250

	words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Describe the battle of September 23, 1918: the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers of the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade taking Haifa from mainly Ottoman forces, within a war in which over a million Indians served overseas and over 74,000 died. 2. Body — three memories — Explain the Indian memory as recovery of agency (Teen Murti Haifa Chowk, Haifa Day), the Israeli memory of gratitude and friendship, and the Palestinian memory of dispossession linked to British control, the Balfour Declaration and 1948. Quote the Palestinian Ambassador's 'victims' argument with attribution. 3. Body — memory as diplomacy — Show how commemoration has been used to strengthen India-Israel ties, and how the dispute over credit reflects national pride. Link to India's policy history: vote against partition in 1947, recognition of Israel in 1950, the PLO in 1974, Palestine in 1988, full ties with Israel in 1992 and de-hyphenation since 2017-18. 4. Body — balancing today — Discuss how India can honour its soldiers without endorsing competing narratives of 1948, while pursuing economic ties with Israel, such as the 2025 investment treaty, and support for a two-state solution amid renewed calls at the UNGA to recognise Palestine. 5. Conclusion — Conclude with Tharoor's point that a mature historical consciousness honours courage while acknowledging the moral ambiguity of empire, and that this is also sound diplomacy.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are India's Ambassador in Tel Aviv. The Haifa Day ceremony is approaching, and the Palestinian mission has publicly objected to its framing. What do you do? Approach: I would keep the ceremony centred on the Indian soldiers, their regiments and the Haifa war graves, avoiding language about 'liberation' that implies a view on later history. I would invite Israeli dignitaries as hosts of the city and keep the event dignified rather than political. In parallel, I would coordinate with our Representative Office in Ramallah so that Palestinian interlocutors hear India's position directly: we honour our soldiers and we support a two-state solution. Quiet communication prevents a commemoration from becoming a controversy. Q2. As a member of a State textbook committee, how would you present the Battle of Haifa to school students? Approach: I would present the facts first: who fought, where, when and under whose command. I would then show that different peoples remember the battle differently and ask students why, using short extracts from Indian, Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. The aim is to teach pride in courage along with the skill of reading history from more than one side. That builds historical thinking rather than slogans. Q3. An interview board asks: were the Indian soldiers at Haifa heroes or victims? Approach: They were brave soldiers serving in a colonial army, and both words capture only part of the truth. Their courage is documented even in British war records, and it belongs to India's history. But they had no say in the political consequences of their victory, which for Palestinians were part of a story of dispossession. I would honour the soldiers while being honest about the empire they served, which is the balance a public servant should strike.

5. Environment & Ecology

Today's four stories are about the same scarce thing: land, and who gets to decide how it is used. A think tank shows that canals can carry solar panels without taking a single new acre, the Centre lets port clearances run for up to three decades, the Environment Minister promises rhinos new grasslands in Bihar and Arunachal, and a British geomorphologist warns that Himalayan valleys full of hydropower sites are exposed to hazards that lake-based warning systems cannot see. The common lesson is that environmental policy is increasingly land-use policy, and the hard choices are about where not to build as much as what to build.

5.1 Canal-Top Solar Could Add 131 GW Without New Land, but Has Not Scaled Since 2012

THE NEWS Gujarat, Punjab and India's wider irrigation network. In an analysis in The Hindu on Wednesday, Shantanu Roy, Sector Coordinator for Renewables and Energy Conservation at the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), argues that India's canal network, one of the largest in the world, is an under-used site for solar power. In canal-top photovoltaics (CTPV), solar panels are mounted on elevated structures built over canal stretches, or along canal banks, designed so that water flows unobstructed; floating solar, by contrast, puts panels on platforms that float on reservoirs. The occasion is the recently approved PM Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY), which aims to develop 5,000 MW of floating solar capacity on reservoirs and other inland water bodies; the author says this interest in "land-neutral" solar could extend to CTPV. The biggest advantage is that CTPV needs virtually no additional land: in Punjab, 20 MW of canal-top systems is estimated to have saved nearly 100 acres. Shade over the canal cuts evaporation, and the water beneath cools the panels and improves their output in hot weather. India was an early adopter. A 1-MW system over the Narmada Canal in Mehsana, Gujarat, commissioned in 2012, reportedly saves close to 9 million litres of water a year while generating 1.6 million units of electricity annually. Two 10-MW systems were commissioned in Vadodara between 2014 and 2017, and 20 MW in Punjab in 2017-18. In 2014 the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) launched a pilot-cum-demonstration scheme targeting 50 MW each of canal-top and canal-bank projects, with assistance of ₹3 crore and ₹1.5 crore per MW respectively, or 30% of project cost, whichever was lower. In September 2025 the Punjab Energy Development Agency invited expressions of interest for 40 MW across a canal network of over 10,000 km, and Haryana is exploring six irrigation canals. A 2024 assessment co-authored by CSTEP put canal-top and canal-bank potential at around 131 GW, with vertical bifacial panels (which capture light on both faces) for canals wider than 30 m; Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab lead. Yet deployment has stayed limited for over a decade because of high structural cost, difficult maintenance over running water, and linear layouts far from substations. The author seeks site prioritisation, viability gap funding, low-cost debt and standard specifications. The syllabus link is GS3 on energy infrastructure and on land as a factor of production.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Solar targets demand large, contiguous tracts of land → land acquisition becomes costly and contested, especially in dense agricultural States → Gujarat builds 1 MW over the Narmada Canal in 2012 and MNRE backs a 50 MW + 50 MW pilot in 2014 → high structural cost, awkward maintenance and poor grid access keep deployment small for a decade → PM-SSY's 5,000 MW floating solar push revives interest in land-neutral solar, with a 131 GW canal potential now mapped

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. India's solar programme sits inside a national climate mission and an international pledge** — The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission was launched in 2010 as one of the eight missions of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (2008), and its target was raised in 2015 to 100 GW of solar capacity by 2022. At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, India announced a target of 500 GW of non-fossil electricity capacity by 2030. India's updated Nationally Determined Contribution, submitted in August 2022, commits to about 50% of cumulative installed electric power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is the nodal ministry for all of these.
- 2. Land, not technology, has become the binding constraint on ground-mounted solar** — Utility-scale solar needs roughly four to five acres per MW; the Punjab example in the article, 100 acres for 20 MW, works out to about five acres per MW. The Centre's scheme for the Development of Solar Parks and Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects

	(2014) tried to pre-assemble land for developers, but solar parks have repeatedly run into disputes over common grazing land and livelihoods. In <i>M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India</i>, the Supreme Court in 2021 ordered power lines in Great Indian Bustard habitat in Rajasthan and Gujarat to be placed underground where feasible, and in 2024 a three-judge bench modified that order while recognising a right against the adverse effects of climate change under Articles 14 and 21. The case shows that even clean energy has a land and biodiversity cost. 3. Floating, canal-top and agrivoltaic systems form the family of land-neutral solar — Floating solar places panels on pontoons on reservoirs and lakes; NTPC's 100 MW floating plant on the Ramagundam reservoir in Telangana, commissioned in 2022, is an early large example. Canal-top systems span the canal on steel structures, while canal-bank systems use the embankment strip. Agrivoltaics raises panels high enough for crops to be grown underneath. All three reduce competition with agriculture, and the water-based ones reduce evaporation, which links them to the water-energy nexus: the idea that decisions about water and power must be planned together because each consumes the other. 4. Viability gap funding exists for projects that are socially useful but commercially thin — The Viability Gap Funding scheme was introduced in 2006 by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, to support public-private partnership infrastructure projects that are economically justified but not financially viable on their own. Under it, the Centre can provide a capital grant of up to 20% of total project cost, and the sponsoring ministry or State may add up to a further 20%. The same idea of a one-time capital grant to bridge the cost gap has since been used for newer energy technologies such as battery storage and offshore wind. PM-KUSUM (2019) is the related farm-solar scheme: its Component A supports small grid-connected plants of up to 2 MW on barren or fallow land, and Component C supports solarisation of grid-connected agricultural pumps.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 asks about infrastructure: energy, and about the costs of growth — The syllabus lists "Infrastructure: Energy" and "Conservation" side by side, and UPSC has asked in GS3 about the status and targets of renewable energy in India and about access to affordable and clean energy under the SDGs. An answer that moves beyond capacity numbers to the land and water constraints on renewables, with CTPV and floating solar as examples, stands out. 2. Prelims tests scheme architecture and technology definitions — Questions on the National Solar Mission, the International Solar Alliance, PM-KUSUM's components and terms such as bifacial panels or floating solar are standard. The first canal-top plant on the Narmada Canal in Gujarat is exactly the kind of 'first in India' fact the paper favours. 3. The land question links energy to the economy paper — Land is one of the four factors of production, and its scarcity drives up the cost of every megawatt. Examiners increasingly ask about trade-offs within green growth, for example renewable energy versus grasslands or bustard habitat, so this story supplies a solution-side example for such answers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Canal-top solar photovoltaics mount panels on elevated structures spanning irrigation canals, requiring virtually no additional land and reducing evaporation from the canal. ● India's first canal-top solar project was commissioned in 2012 over the Narmada Canal in Mehsana district, Gujarat. ● The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission, launched in 2010, is one of the

eight national missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change, 2008.

- Bifacial solar modules generate electricity from light falling on both their front and rear surfaces.
- The Viability Gap Funding scheme for PPP infrastructure is administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and allows central support of up to 20% of total project cost.
- Component A of PM-KUSUM supports decentralised grid-connected renewable power plants of up to 2 MW on barren or fallow land.
- India's updated NDC (2022) commits to about 50% of cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The 131 GW figure is a technical ceiling; the grid map will set the real number** — The CSTEP estimate already screens for irradiation, canal geometry, protected areas and distance from substations, but technical potential is not economic potential. Canals run through farmland, far from load centres, and a linear plant strung along several kilometres needs more cabling and more connection points than a compact solar park. The article itself notes that costs rise where substations or transformers are not strategically located. A realistic target would therefore start with canal stretches that pass near existing agricultural feeders and substations. Even a small fraction of 131 GW, however, is significant for States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which top the list and where farmland is too valuable to cover with panels.
- 2. The 2014 pilot failed for institutional reasons that money alone cannot fix** — The 2014 scheme offered generous support of ₹3 crore per MW for canal-top projects and still did not produce a pipeline, which the author concedes shows financial support alone may not suffice. The deeper problem is ownership: canals belong to irrigation departments, whose priority is water delivery, desilting and embankment repair, while power belongs to State nodal agencies and distribution companies. A structure over a canal complicates the irrigation engineer's job, and nobody in the irrigation department is rewarded for generating electricity. Unless revenue-sharing or lease payments give irrigation departments a stake, they will treat CTPV as a nuisance. The counter-view is that the economics have changed since 2014 because module prices have fallen steeply, so the structural premium is now a smaller share of total cost.
- 3. Water saving is a bonus, not the business case** — The Mehsana plant's 9 million litres a year is useful, but in most Indian canals seepage through unlined beds loses far more water than evaporation from the surface. Selling CTPV mainly as a water-saving measure invites the obvious question of whether the same money would save more water if spent on canal lining. The stronger argument is land: 100 acres saved for every 20 MW in Punjab is farmland that stays under crops, and land acquisition disputes are what delay solar parks. Policy should therefore price the avoided land cost when comparing CTPV with ground-mounted solar, rather than comparing only per-MW capital costs.
- 4. Canal-top solar fits naturally with decentralised farm power** — Canal commands are exactly where agricultural pumping load sits, so power generated over the canal can be fed into nearby agricultural feeders with low transmission losses. This matches the logic of feeder-level solarisation under PM-KUSUM, which aims to supply daytime power to farmers from local plants. A combined programme could let a State solarise feeders using canal stretches instead of acquiring fallow land. The risk is that distribution companies, already burdened by subsidised farm tariffs, may resist buying more daytime power at a higher tariff, which is why viability gap funding and standard power purchase terms matter.
- 5. Standard designs are the cheapest reform on the list** — Every early project was a

	bespoke engineering exercise, designed to a particular canal's width, orientation and flow. Standard specifications for spans, foundations, wind loads and maintenance access would cut design time, give lenders confidence and let manufacturers build to volume. The author's call for standardised guidelines and streamlined process flows is therefore more than administrative tidiness: it is how costs fell for rooftop and ground-mounted solar. A national design code, prepared with irrigation engineers rather than only power engineers, would also address the maintenance problem at the design stage.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Land, rather than technology or finance, has become the binding constraint on India's solar expansion." Discuss this statement and examine the potential and the limitations of land-neutral options such as canal-top and floating solar. Suggest measures to scale them. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with India's 2030 non-fossil targets and the land needed for utility solar, about five acres per MW (the Punjab example of 100 acres saved for 20 MW). Mention the recently approved PM Surya Sarovar Yojana for 5,000 MW of floating solar. 2. Body — the potential — Explain CTPV and floating solar; cite the Mehsana plant of 2012 (1 MW, about 9 million litres of water saved and 1.6 million units a year), the Vadodara and Punjab projects, and the 2024 estimate of about 131 GW led by U.P., Bihar, Karnataka, A.P. and Punjab. Add the co-benefits: saved farmland, reduced evaporation and panel cooling. 3. Body — the limitations — Discuss higher structural costs, maintenance over running water, linear layouts and distance from substations, and the failure of the 2014 MNRE pilot to scale despite subsidy. Bring in the institutional gap between irrigation departments and power agencies. 4. Body — measures — Suggest site prioritisation near feeders and substations, viability gap funding and low-cost debt, national design standards, revenue-sharing with irrigation departments, and integration with PM-KUSUM feeder solarisation. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that land-neutral solar will not replace ground-mounted or rooftop solar but can take pressure off farmland and commons, and that its success depends on institutions as much as on subsidies.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are Secretary, Irrigation, in Uttar Pradesh, and the energy department wants to put solar panels over 50 km of your canals. What conditions would you set? Approach: My first condition would be that no structure obstructs flow, desilting or embankment repair, with designs approved by our chief engineers. I would insist on a lease or revenue share for the irrigation department so that my field staff have a reason to cooperate. I would ask for a maintenance protocol that fixes responsibility for panel cleaning, repairs and safety near the water. Finally, I would pilot on stretches close to substations and farm feeders before committing the full 50 km. Q2. As a District Collector, farmers are protesting the acquisition of 500 acres for a solar park. How could canal-top solar help you? Approach: I would first check whether nearby canal stretches can host part of the capacity, since canal land is already government-owned and needs no acquisition. Even a partial shift reduces the land demand and the number of families affected. I would present the comparison in a public meeting with the developer and the power agency, showing costs openly. Where land must still be taken, I would ensure fair compensation and explore leasing rather than outright acquisition.

Q3. An interview board asks: with limited money, should a State spend on canal-top solar or on lining its canals?

Approach: The two do different jobs, so the choice depends on the State's problem. If water loss is the main concern, lining saves far more water than shading, because seepage losses usually exceed evaporation. If the State's constraint is land for renewable targets, canal-top solar gives power without acquisition. The best answer is sequencing: line and repair priority canals first, then design canal-top structures for those same stretches so that one intervention does not undo the other.

5.2 Centre Doubles Port Environmental Clearance Validity to 20 Years, With Two Conditional Five-Year Extensions

THE NEWS New Delhi, September 22. The Centre has notified a major relaxation in the environmental clearance process, doubling the validity of clearances granted to ports and harbours to a minimum of 20 years, with room for two five-year extensions subject to conditions, The Indian Express reports. The notification, published on Monday, amends the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006, which governs the country's environmental clearance (EC) process. An EC is the permission a project must obtain from the Environment Ministry or a State authority before it starts, after its likely impact on air, water, land and people has been studied; its "validity" is the window within which the project must begin operating, after which the permission lapses. Under the amendment, clearance for port and harbour projects can be extended by five years beyond the 20-year period, subject to appraisal committees reviewing the adequacy of existing environmental safeguards. A further five-year extension may be granted in "deserving cases" if the project remains non-operational. The sectoral Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) or the State-level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) can recommend this second extension after examination and subject to environmental safeguards, the amendment states. Until now, EC for ports and harbours was valid for 10 years with a one-year extension, after which projects had to seek fresh clearance. The amendment follows requests from industry and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways to "rationalise" this framework. "The ministry has received a request to rationalise the validity period of the environmental clearances granted to Ports and Harbours, which is currently valid for an initial period of ten years, which may be extended for a further period of one year," the notification states. Under the 2006 Notification, new projects in specified sectors need prior EC, and so do expansion, modernisation, capacity additions and product-mix changes beyond set thresholds, based on an EIA, a public hearing where applicable, and final appraisal by expert committees. The change comes as maritime finance also expands: Sagarmala Finance Corporation, described as India's first maritime lender, plans to raise ₹600 crore, including a greenshoe option (the right to keep oversubscribed money) of ₹500 crore, through the country's maiden blue bond on September 28, according to a Reuters report in The Hindu; blue bonds finance water and marine projects such as shipping, sustainable fishing and ocean energy. The syllabus link is GS3 on environmental impact assessment and infrastructure.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

The EIA Notification, 2006 gives every clearance a fixed validity so that appraisals do not go stale → large ports take years to finance, phase and build, and a 10-plus-one-year window forces fresh clearance midway → industry and the Ports Ministry seek "rationalisation" as maritime expansion and maritime finance grow → the Centre notifies a 20-year validity with two conditional five-year extensions → a port clearance can now remain live for up to 30 years from the original appraisal

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The EIA Notification is delegated legislation under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** — Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take all measures necessary to protect and improve the environment, including restricting the areas in which industries and processes may be carried out. Read with Rule 5 of the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986, it is the legal basis of the EIA Notification of 14 September 2006, which replaced the EIA Notification of 1994. There is no separate Act of Parliament on EIA, so the regime can be changed by notification, which is why it has been amended many times since 2006. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change administers it.

	2. Projects are sorted into Category A and Category B, and appraised in four stages — Category A projects are appraised at the Centre by sector-wise Expert Appraisal Committees, and the Ministry grants the clearance. Category B projects are appraised at the State level by the State Expert Appraisal Committee and cleared by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority; B1 projects need a full EIA report, while B2 projects are exempted from it. The four stages are screening (for Category B only), scoping (fixing the terms of reference for the EIA study), public consultation (including a public hearing for most projects) and appraisal. Ports, harbours, breakwaters and dredging are listed as item 7(e) in the Schedule, with ports handling 5 million tonnes per annum or more of cargo placed in Category A. 3. Ports also need clearance under the coastal regulation regime — The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, first issued in 1991 under the same Environment (Protection) Act, regulates construction along the coast; its current version is the CRZ Notification, 2019, which replaced the 2011 notification and followed the Shailesh Nayak Committee report. Ports are among the activities that need foreshore facilities and are therefore permissible in CRZ areas subject to clearance. Coastal Zone Management Authorities at the national and State levels examine such projects. A port thus sits at the meeting point of two notifications, both of which can be amended by the executive. 4. Courts have tied environmental clearance to precaution and have resisted clearances after the fact — In Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996), the Supreme Court held that the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle are part of Indian environmental law. In Alembic Pharmaceuticals v. Rohit Prajapati (2020), it held that the concept of an ex post facto clearance, granted after a project has already begun, is contrary to environmental jurisprudence. In Vanashakti v. Union of India (May 2025), a two-judge bench struck down the Centre's 2017 notification and 2021 office memorandum allowing such post-facto clearances, but a three-judge bench recalled that judgment in November 2025, so the issue remains contested. The thread through these cases is that appraisal must come before construction and must reflect current conditions.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. EIA is named in the GS3 syllabus itself — The syllabus reads "Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment". UPSC has asked about the purpose and weaknesses of EIA, and the controversy over the draft EIA Notification, 2020, which proposed post-facto approvals and a shorter public comment period, was widely expected to feed into questions. Validity periods are the next logical sub-topic, since they decide how long an appraisal stays trustworthy. 2. Port-led development is a recurring infrastructure theme — Sagarmala (approved in 2015), the Maritime India Vision 2030 (released in 2021) and the Amrit Kaal Maritime Vision 2047 frame ports as engines of growth. Mains questions on infrastructure and the blue economy expect candidates to weigh port-led growth against coastal ecology and fisher livelihoods, which this story illustrates directly. 3. Prelims draws on the institutions of environmental clearance — The difference between EAC and SEIAA, the parent Act of the EIA and CRZ notifications, and the meaning of terms like blue bonds and the precautionary principle are classic Prelims material. This amendment is a convenient hook for revising all of them together.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	• The EIA Notification, 2006 was issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and replaced the EIA Notification of 1994. • Under the EIA Notification, 2006, Category A projects are appraised by the Expert Appraisal Committee at the Centre, while Category B projects are cleared by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority on the recommendation

of the State Expert Appraisal Committee.

- The four stages of environmental clearance under the 2006 Notification are screening (for Category B projects only), scoping, public consultation and appraisal.
- The Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019, which replaced the 2011 notification, is issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The Supreme Court recognised the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle as part of Indian environmental law in *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India* (1996).
- Blue bonds are debt instruments used to raise finance for projects related to oceans and water, such as sustainable fishing, shipping, marine conservation and ocean energy.
- Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take measures to protect the environment, including restricting the areas in which industries may operate.

ANALYSIS

- 1. A clearance's validity is a safeguard, because baseline data ages** — An EIA describes the coast as it was when the study was done: mangroves, fishing grounds, erosion patterns and settlements. A validity window forces a project to either build while that picture is accurate or come back for a fresh look. Doubling it to 20 years, with up to 10 more, means a port could begin construction on data collected nearly three decades earlier. Coasts are among the fastest-changing landscapes, altered by sea-level rise, cyclones and neighbouring development. The first extension at least requires committees to review the adequacy of safeguards, but a review of safeguards is not a fresh baseline study or a fresh public hearing.
- 2. The industry's complaint is real, and the old rule had a genuine flaw** — Ports are built in phases over many years, and financing depends on traffic that arrives slowly. Under a 10-plus-one-year window, a port developer could find its clearance lapsing midway through a planned expansion, forcing a new clearance for a project whose impacts had already been assessed. This duplication adds cost and uncertainty without adding much protection. Long-term certainty also matters for new financing channels such as blue bonds, since lenders price regulatory risk. The honest case for the amendment is that it matches the clearance to the life cycle of a port; the question is whether the conditions attached are strong enough.
- 3. The second extension rewards delay, which is the opposite of what validity is for** — The further five-year extension is available in "deserving cases" when the project remains non-operational. A project that has not started after 25 years is precisely the one whose original appraisal is most out of date. Allowing it another extension on the recommendation of an appraisal committee, rather than requiring fresh clearance, turns validity into a reservation of land and permission. Clear criteria for what counts as "deserving", published in advance, would reduce the risk of discretion and lobbying. Without them, the clause may become the default rather than the exception.
- 4. Monitoring capacity, not the length of validity, is the real weak point** — Clearances come with conditions, and compliance is checked through six-monthly reports and inspections by the Ministry's regional offices, which are thinly staffed. Longer validity increases the stock of live clearances that must be monitored for longer periods. If monitoring does not grow, a longer validity effectively means a longer period of unchecked conditions. A better trade would have been longer validity in exchange for stronger periodic review: a mandatory compliance audit before each extension, published online, and an updated baseline for any project still unbuilt after 10 years.
- 5. Sector-by-sector relaxation shows why EIA needs a statute** — This amendment

	responds to one ministry's request for one sector, and similar changes have been made for other sectors over the years. Because EIA rests on a notification, it can be reshaped by the executive without parliamentary debate, and each change is individually modest while the cumulative effect is large. A statutory EIA law would fix principles such as the maximum age of baseline data and the right to a public hearing, while leaving thresholds to rules. The counter-view is that notifications allow quick correction of real problems, as the ports case shows, and a rigid statute could slow necessary reform.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Longer validity for environmental clearances gives certainty to long-gestation infrastructure, but risks turning environmental appraisal into a one-time formality." Critically examine this statement in the context of the recent amendment to the EIA Notification, 2006 for ports and harbours. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — State the amendment: validity of EC for ports and harbours raised from 10 years plus one to a minimum of 20 years, with one five-year extension after review of safeguards and another for non-operational projects in deserving cases, following requests from industry and the Ports Ministry. 2. Body — the case for certainty — Explain long gestation and phased development of ports, duplication under the old rule, and the link to financing through instruments such as blue bonds. Place it in the context of Sagarmala and the Maritime India Vision 2030. 3. Body — the risks — Discuss ageing baseline data on fast-changing coasts, the absence of a fresh public hearing for extensions, the second extension for non-operational projects, weak monitoring capacity, and the precautionary principle from Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum. Mention the CRZ layer. 4. Body — a balanced design — Propose published criteria for "deserving cases", compliance audits before each extension, a mandatory baseline update for projects unbuilt after 10 years, and stronger regional monitoring. Suggest a statutory EIA framework for core principles. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that certainty and scrutiny are not opposites: a clearance can be long-lived if it is periodically refreshed, and that is the balance the amendment should be judged on.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a member of the Expert Appraisal Committee. A port project cleared 25 years ago, never built, seeks the second five-year extension. What will you examine? Approach: I would first ask why the project did not start and whether the reasons were outside the developer's control. I would compare the original baseline with current satellite imagery, CRZ maps and shoreline change data to see how much the site has changed. If mangroves, fishing grounds or settlements have changed materially, I would recommend fresh scoping and a public hearing rather than an extension. My recommendation would be in writing with reasons, so that the decision can be reviewed. Q2. As District Collector of a coastal district, fishers say a port being built now was cleared long ago without anyone asking them. How do you respond? Approach: I would meet the fishers' cooperatives and record their specific concerns about access to landing sites, fishing grounds and erosion. I would ask the developer for the clearance conditions and compliance reports and share them publicly, since the conditions are a public document. Where conditions are being violated, I would report it to the Ministry's regional office and the State Coastal Zone Management Authority. I would also press for a local grievance committee with fisher representation for the

construction period.

Q3. An interview board asks: should India have a separate law on environmental impact assessment?

Approach: There is a strong case, because the present system rests on a notification that can be changed quickly and repeatedly without parliamentary scrutiny. A law could guarantee core principles such as public hearings, the independence of appraisal bodies and limits on the age of baseline data. Rules could still handle sector thresholds and procedures. The risk is rigidity, so the law should fix principles and leave details to delegated legislation subject to review.

5.3 Rhino Phase I (2026-31) to Expand Range Into Bihar, Arunachal as a Grassland Atlas Is Planned

THE NEWS New Delhi. Writing in The Indian Express to mark World Rhino Day on September 22, Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Bhupender Yadav set out the government's plans for the greater one-horned rhinoceros; this is the government's own account of its programme. The rhino's historical range, he writes, extended across the northern subcontinent along the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra river systems, but its wild population in India is now concentrated mainly in Assam, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, in the Brahmaputra floodplains and the Terai grasslands. The National Conservation Strategy for the rhinoceros, launched in 2019, provides a framework for strengthening existing populations, restoring the species to suitable former habitats, maintaining genetic security (enough separate populations that one flood or disease cannot wipe out most of the species, and enough mixing to avoid inbreeding) and habitat connectivity, promoting scientifically planned translocations and building climate resilience. Rhino numbers have risen from around 1,500 in the 1980s to more than 4,000 as of September 2024. A five-year Phase I (2026-2031), proposed for support through the National CAMPA Authority, brings together Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, with a focus on scientific monitoring, protection, habitat restoration, translocation planning, coexistence and capacity building, and seeks to support expansion into suitable areas in Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh. CAMPA funds come from agencies that divert forest land. The Rhino Conservation Action Plan provides for mapping grasslands and wetlands, identifying invasive species, prioritising habitats for restoration and protected-area-specific management protocols. Grasslands need science-based management to prevent degradation, "inappropriate succession" (the natural drift of grassland into scrub and woodland) and the spread of invasive species; the same habitats shelter swamp deer, wild buffalo, elephants, tigers and grassland birds. A separate five-year (2026-2031) Comprehensive Assessment of Indian Grasslands, to be implemented by the Wildlife Institute of India, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and the Forest Survey of India, will assess grassland extent, condition, biodiversity, degradation, ecosystem services and carbon potential, supporting a National Grassland Atlas. Flooding is intrinsic to landscapes like Kaziranga, but more extreme events make access to higher ground and dispersal routes important. At the Second Asian Rhino Range States Conservation Meeting in New Delhi in 2019, India, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal adopted the New Delhi Declaration, he recalls. The piece names no budget or specific sites. The syllabus link is GS3 on conservation and biodiversity.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rhinos once ranged along the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra floodplains → hunting and conversion of floodplain grasslands shrink them to a few protected areas in Assam, U.P. and West Bengal → strict protection lifts numbers from about 1,500 in the 1980s to over 4,000 by September 2024, but most animals remain in a handful of sites → concentration creates flood, disease and genetic risks, so the 2019 National Conservation Strategy prescribes range restoration → Phase I (2026-31), proposed for CAMPA funding, targets expansion into Bihar and Arunachal, backed by a national grassland assessment

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

1. **The greater one-horned rhino is a recovering but still Vulnerable species** — The greater one-horned or Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is found in India and Nepal and is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, having been moved there from Endangered in 2008. It is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and listed in Appendix I of CITES, which bans international commercial trade. Of

the other two Asian rhinos, the Javan and the Sumatran rhinoceros are both Critically Endangered; Africa has the white and black rhinoceros. The horn is made of keratin, the protein in human hair and nails, and demand for it in traditional medicine has driven poaching. World Rhino Day, September 22, was first announced by WWF-South Africa in 2010.

2. **A handful of protected areas carry India's rhinos** — Kaziranga National Park in Assam holds the largest population of the species in the world and, with Manas National Park, was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam has the highest density of rhinos, and Orang National Park is another Assam stronghold. Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh received rhinos in a reintroduction in 1984, and Jaldapara and Gorumara National Parks hold West Bengal's rhinos. Under Indian Rhino Vision 2020, launched by Assam in 2005 with conservation partners, the goal was 3,000 rhinos spread over seven protected areas, and translocations restored rhinos to Manas, which had lost them to poaching.
3. **CAMPA money comes from forest diversion and is governed by a 2016 Act** — When forest land is diverted for non-forest use under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, now titled the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 after the 2023 amendment, the user agency pays for compensatory afforestation and the net present value of the lost forest. Supreme Court orders in the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad case led to an ad hoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) to hold these funds. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 placed them in a National Fund in the Public Account of India and State Funds in the Public Accounts of the States, with 90% going to States and 10% to the National Fund. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Rules, 2018 list permissible uses, which include wildlife and habitat management along with afforestation.
4. **Floodplain grasslands are ecosystems in their own right, not wasteland** — The Terai and Brahmaputra floodplain grasslands are kept open by annual floods, grazing and fire; without them, they turn into woodland through ecological succession. They support grassland specialists such as the swamp deer or barasingha (Vulnerable), the wild water buffalo (Endangered) and the Bengal florican (Critically Endangered). Invasive plants such as Mikania micrantha and Chromolaena odorata smother these grasslands. Historically, many open grasslands have been recorded as degraded or wasteland in land records and in the Wastelands Atlas of India, making them easy targets for tree plantations and diversion. The Wildlife Institute of India (1982), the Forest Survey of India (1981), which publishes the biennial India State of Forest Report, and the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education are all headquartered in Dehradun.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **Prelims asks species status and protected areas every year** — UPSC regularly asks which protected areas host a particular flagship species, the IUCN status of animals, and Schedule and CITES listings. The rhino's status, its main parks and the three Asian rhino species are standard targets, and the New Delhi Declaration of 2019 is a convention-style fact of the kind the paper likes.
2. **Mains wants conservation beyond the tiger** — GS3 asks about biodiversity conservation, in-situ and ex-situ methods and the role of funding mechanisms. The shift from protecting one site to restoring a species' historical range, and from species to landscapes such as grasslands, is the kind of analytical move an examiner rewards.
3. **Grasslands are an emerging examination theme** — The Great Indian Bustard litigation, the debate over tree planting on open natural ecosystems and the treatment of grasslands as wasteland have made grassland conservation a live topic. The National Grassland Atlas gives candidates a concrete, dated initiative to cite.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The greater one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES.
- Kaziranga and Manas National Parks in Assam were both inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1985.
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam has the highest density of the greater one-horned rhinoceros.
- The Javan and Sumatran rhinoceros are both classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
- Under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016, the National Fund is kept in the Public Account of India and 90% of the collected funds go to the State Funds.
- The New Delhi Declaration on Asian rhinos was adopted in 2019 at the Second Asian Rhino Range States Meeting by India, Bhutan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal.
- The Forest Survey of India, which publishes the biennial India State of Forest Report, is headquartered in Dehradun.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The headcount is a success; the geography is still a risk** — A rise from about 1,500 to over 4,000 is among the best recovery records for any large mammal in Asia. But most of these animals remain in a few protected areas, above all Kaziranga, which floods every year. A single extreme flood, disease outbreak or poaching surge in one park could undo a large share of the gains. This is why the Minister's emphasis on genetic security and range expansion is sound in principle. The measure of success over the next five years should therefore be the number of secure, breeding populations, not the total count.
- 2. Range expansion is a social project, not a transport operation** — Moving rhinos to Bihar and Arunachal is the easy part; keeping them alive there is the hard part. Manas lost its entire rhino population during years of insurgency and had to be restocked, which shows that a site must be secure before animals arrive. New populations will also raid crops at the edge of protected areas, so coexistence, which the Minister lists, needs compensation, fencing and community staff on the ground. The op-ed names no sites, no budget and no timeline for first translocations, and Phase I is only "proposed" for CAMPA support. Until these are public, the plan is a direction rather than a programme.
- 3. Using CAMPA for grasslands corrects a bias, but raises a principle** — Compensatory afforestation has usually meant planting trees, often on open land that was never forest, which harms grassland species. Directing CAMPA money to grassland restoration and rhino habitat therefore corrects a tree-centric bias in how India compensates for lost forests. Yet CAMPA funds exist because forests elsewhere have been cut for mines, roads and dams, and using them for a flagship species programme can blur the question of whether the lost forest is actually being replaced. The CAG's 2013 audit of compensatory afforestation found serious deficiencies in how such funds were used, so transparent outcome reporting matters as much as the allocation.
- 4. The Grassland Atlas may matter more than the rhino plan** — India has no official map of its grasslands, which is why they are so easily recorded as wasteland and handed over for plantations, solar parks or industry. An assessment of extent, condition, biodiversity and carbon potential by WII, ICFRE and FSI would give grasslands the statistical visibility forests have through the State of Forest Report. That visibility is the first step towards legal recognition. The counter-view is that an atlas without a legal category changes nothing: many grasslands are revenue or common land, outside the

	Forest Department's control, and mapping them could even invite 'greening' with trees if carbon potential is measured only above ground. 5. What the Minister's account leaves out — The op-ed does not mention poaching, historically the main threat, or the invasive plants already spread across Kaziranga and Manas. It does not discuss the national highway along Kaziranga's southern edge, where animals crossing to the Karbi Anglong hills during floods are hit, or the Supreme Court's 2019 ban on mining in Kaziranga's animal corridors, which shows that connectivity depends on land outside the parks. Nor does it address the eviction drives and livelihood conflicts around rhino habitats. A government's op-ed is expected to celebrate; the examiner expects candidates to supply the rest.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	India's rhino recovery is often cited as a conservation success, yet the concentration of the population in a few protected areas remains a risk. Discuss the rationale and challenges of expanding the range of the greater one-horned rhinoceros, and explain why grassland management is central to its long-term survival. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Note the rise from about 1,500 rhinos in the 1980s to over 4,000 by September 2024, concentrated mainly in Assam, U.P. and West Bengal, and the 2019 National Conservation Strategy. 2. Body — rationale for range expansion — Explain genetic security, flood and disease risk in Kaziranga, the historical range along the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra, and the precedent of Dudhwa and Manas translocations. Mention Phase I (2026-31) covering five States with expansion into Bihar and Arunachal. 3. Body — challenges — Discuss habitat security, poaching, crop raiding and coexistence, funding through CAMPA and its limits, missing corridors outside parks, and climate-driven extreme floods requiring access to higher ground. 4. Body — grasslands — Explain succession, invasive species, the wasteland classification problem, the Rhino Conservation Action Plan's mapping, and the Comprehensive Assessment of Indian Grasslands leading to a National Grassland Atlas. Link to other grassland species such as swamp deer and Bengal florican. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that the rhino's future depends on managing landscapes, not only guarding parks, and that success should be measured by the number of secure populations and the area of restored grassland.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Divisional Forest Officer in Bihar where rhinos are to be introduced. What must be in place before the first animal arrives? Approach: I would ensure that the habitat has enough grassland and water, that invasive plants have been cleared, and that anti-poaching staff, camps and intelligence networks are in position. I would meet villages on the fringe to explain the plan, set up a quick compensation system for crop damage and hire local people as trackers. I would establish veterinary and monitoring arrangements, including radio-collaring. The translocation should wait until these are ready, however much pressure there is to show quick results. Q2. As Director of Kaziranga during a major flood, animals are crossing the highway towards the hills. What do you do? Approach: I would coordinate with the district administration and police to regulate traffic on the corridor stretches, with speed limits, timed closures and patrols. Forest staff would be deployed at known crossing points and on higher ground to prevent poaching when animals are vulnerable. I would keep rescue and veterinary teams ready for stranded or injured animals. After the flood, I would document crossings to press for permanent measures such as elevated roads over the corridors.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it right to fund a flagship species programme from money paid to compensate for destroyed forests?

Approach: It can be right if the programme restores habitats that are genuinely equivalent in ecological value, such as grasslands that tree-planting has neglected. The danger is that flagship projects become a convenient use of funds while the lost forest is never truly replaced. The test should be outcomes: area restored, species secured and reports published. I would support the use with strict outcome reporting and independent audit.

5.4 Rasuwa Disaster Was a Rock-Ice Avalanche, Not a GLOF, and Needs Seismic Warning Networks

THE NEWS Rasuwa, Nepal, and Tibet. The disaster that struck across the Nepal-Tibet border began with a rock-ice avalanche that turned into a debris flow, not with a glacial lake outburst, argues Stuart Dunning, professor of applied geomorphology at Newcastle University, UK, in The Indian Express. A rock-ice avalanche is a sudden collapse of rock and glacier ice from a steep mountain slope; a debris flow is a fast-moving slurry of water, mud and boulders that can travel far down a valley. A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is the sudden release of water from a lake held back by a glacier or by loose glacial debris. Dunning says the same sequence caused the Dharali disaster in 2025, and that a rock-ice avalanche from Ronti Peak in 2021 became the debris flow behind the Chamoli disaster. None of these, he writes, is “natural”: they become disasters only when they hit lives and property. First reports from Nepal suggested an earthquake and possibly a GLOF. GLOFs are a real risk: his group once calculated that 15 million people globally face GLOF danger, over 9 million of them in High Mountain Asia and nearly 3 million in India alone. But the “earthquake” was the force of the avalanche hitting the valley floor, and there was no glacial lake in the valley. The Rasuwa event was therefore harder to plan for: there was no lake to model floods from, to drain or to monitor. Such avalanches could start from many hundreds of thousands of steep, rapidly deglaciating slopes with thawing permafrost (ground that stays frozen for years) in the Himalaya. In both Chamoli and Rasuwa, a significant number of the dead or missing were workers at hydropower infrastructure in the path of the flows. Existing systems gave enough warning downstream but not upstream, and warning depends on detection, communication and how fast people act. A denser seismic station network could detect and locate the landslide-generated tremor and the continuous seismic “noise” that floods make, but this has not been done because it needs cross-border cooperation across the Himalaya and tens of millions of dollars. The science, he argues, must be embedded in communities that trust the warnings and know what to do; even then, “we may save lives... but we do not save the places”. The syllabus link is GS1 geomorphology and GS3 disaster management.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Warming thins Himalayan glaciers and thaws permafrost on steep slopes → slopes lose the ice that binds and supports them and fail as rock-ice avalanches → avalanches pick up water and sediment and become long-running debris flows → valleys crowded with hydropower sites and workers take the blow, as at Chamoli (2021) and Rasuwa → lake-centred GLOF warning cannot see these cascades, strengthening the case for dense seismic networks and community-trusted warnings

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. A GLOF and a rock-ice avalanche are different hazards with different warning logic —** A glacial lake outburst flood occurs when a lake dammed by a glacier or by a moraine, the loose ridge of debris a glacier leaves behind, breaches suddenly, often after an avalanche into the lake, heavy rain or an earthquake. Because the source is a known lake, it can be mapped, modelled, partly drained and fitted with sensors. The South Lhonak lake GLOF in Sikkim in October 2023 destroyed the Chungthang dam of the Teesta-III hydropower project, a textbook case of this type. A rock-ice avalanche has no fixed source: it can come from any steep slope where rock and ice are weakening, which is why Dunning calls it harder to plan for.
- 2. Deglaciation and permafrost thaw weaken mountain slopes —** Permafrost is ground that stays at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive years; in high mountains it includes ice in the cracks of bedrock that acts like cement. As temperatures rise, this

	ice thaws and the rock mass loses strength. Retreating glaciers also remove the support they once gave to valley walls, a process called debuttreasing, leaving steep slopes prone to collapse. The Himalaya, often called the Third Pole for its stock of ice, is warming faster than the global average, so these slope failures are expected to become more frequent. 3. India's disaster law and NDMA guidance treat GLOFs as a distinct hazard — The Disaster Management Act, 2005 set up the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), chaired by the Prime Minister, with State and District authorities below it. In 2020 NDMA issued national guidelines on the management of GLOFs, covering the mapping of glacial lakes, early warning systems, lowering lake levels where needed, and land-use regulation in flood paths. In the regional sphere, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Kathmandu, brings together eight Hindu Kush Himalayan countries, including India, Nepal and China, for research on mountain hazards. Chamoli in February 2021 showed the limits of this framework, since its flood struck the Rishiganga and Tapovan-Vishnugad hydropower projects without any lake burst. 4. The Sendai Framework makes early warning a global target — The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted in March 2015 at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, succeeding the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015). It sets seven global targets and four priorities: understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in risk reduction for resilience, and enhancing preparedness with 'Build Back Better' in recovery. Its Target G seeks to increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems. India launched the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in 2019, headquartered in New Delhi, which focuses on making infrastructure such as power plants resilient to disasters.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Disaster management and geophysical phenomena are fixed syllabus items — GS1 covers important geophysical phenomena and GS3 covers disaster and disaster management. Mains has asked directly about the Sendai Framework and how it differs from the Hyogo Framework, and Himalayan disasters such as Kedarnath and Chamoli have prompted questions on causes and preparedness. This op-ed gives the latest science: that the dominant hazard may not be the one the policy is built around. 2. Prelims tests hazard definitions and institutions — Definitions of GLOF, permafrost and debris flow, and facts about NDMA, CDRI, ICIMOD and the Sendai Framework, are regular Prelims material. The distinction between a lake-sourced flood and a slope-sourced avalanche is exactly the kind of conceptual trap an examiner can set. 3. Hydropower in fragile zones links environment, energy and security — Questions on Himalayan hydropower now combine clean-energy benefits with disaster risk and cross-border water relations with Nepal and China. The fact that hydropower workers made up many of the victims in Chamoli and Rasuwa gives a human dimension candidates can use in GS3 and in Essay.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● A glacial lake outburst flood is the sudden release of water from a lake dammed by a glacier or a moraine, the debris ridge deposited by a glacier. ● Permafrost is ground that remains at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive years. ● The National Disaster Management Authority, established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, is chaired by the Prime Minister. ● The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 has seven global targets and four priorities for action and succeeded the Hyogo Framework for

Action 2005-2015.

- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure was launched by India in 2019 and is headquartered in New Delhi.
- The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is headquartered in Kathmandu and has eight Hindu Kush Himalayan member countries, including India.
- The 2021 Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand originated from a rock-ice avalanche from Ronti Peak that became a debris flow.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Calling every mountain flood a GLOF leads to the wrong fix** — Policy has concentrated on glacial lakes because they are visible, countable and can be engineered: lowered, siphoned or fitted with sensors. If the Rasuwa, Chamoli and Dharali disasters all began on slopes rather than in lakes, then a lake-centred programme protects against only part of the risk. Dunning's point that there are hundreds of thousands of deglaciating slopes means that the hazard cannot be managed site by site. The policy vocabulary needs to widen from 'GLOF risk' to 'cascading high-mountain hazards', with separate tools for each. That does not make GLOF work wasteful, since the South Lhonak flood in Sikkim was a genuine lake burst.
- 2. Warnings protect those downstream; the people upstream are often hydropower workers** — Dunning notes that existing systems gave enough warning downstream but not upstream, and that hydropower workers were a significant share of the dead in both Chamoli and Rasuwa. Dams, intakes and tunnels are built high in valleys precisely where the warning time is shortest. This makes worker safety a matter of project design: evacuation routes out of tunnels, sirens at work sites and rules that stop work when upstream sensors trigger. Environmental clearance for such projects should require an assessment of cascading hazards, not only a flood design standard. The counter-view is that hydropower gives firm, low-carbon power and revenue to Himalayan States, so the answer is safer siting and operation rather than a blanket halt.
- 3. The seismic network is cheap; the hard part is sharing data across borders** — Tens of millions of dollars is small compared with the losses from a single disaster and the value of the hydropower assets at risk. The real obstacle is that a useful network must span India, Nepal, Bhutan and China, since avalanches in Tibet can flow into Nepal and floods can cross into India. India-China arrangements for flood-season hydrological data on the Brahmaputra and Sutlej have been intermittent, which shows how politics can interrupt science. India could lead by offering seismic data from its side openly and by funding stations in Nepal and Bhutan through bodies such as ICIMOD or CDRI. Shared warnings are also a low-cost form of neighbourhood diplomacy.
- 4. Trust is a governance variable, not a soft extra** — Dunning's insistence that science be embedded in communities who trust the warnings reflects hard experience. Warnings that are too frequent and wrong lead people to ignore them, while warnings that come without instructions leave people unsure where to go. Odisha's cyclone record shows the difference: after the 1999 super cyclone, community shelters, drills and local volunteers cut deaths dramatically in later cyclones. Mountain villages need the same: marked safe zones, rehearsed routes, local volunteers trained to relay alerts, and feedback so that false alarms are explained. Detection without this last mile is incomplete.
- 5. Saving lives is possible; saving places requires land-use decisions** — Dunning closes by saying that warnings may save lives but not places, which raises the uncomfortable question of where people can and cannot live. Settlements and hotels on river terraces and debris fans, such as those hit at Dharali, sit on landforms built by past floods. The Joshimath subsidence of 2023 showed how unregulated construction in the mountains

	creates risk. Hazard zonation that restricts new construction on such landforms is politically difficult because it limits livelihoods and tourism. Yet without it, every warning system only buys time for people to flee buildings that should not have been there.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Hazard cascades in the Himalaya do not always begin with a glacial lake.” In the light of recent disasters in Nepal and Uttarakhand, discuss the limits of lake-centred GLOF risk management and suggest an early warning and land-use approach suited to rock-ice avalanches and debris flows. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Define GLOF, rock-ice avalanche and debris flow. State Dunning’s finding that the Rasuwa disaster, like Chamoli (2021, Ronti Peak) and Dharali (2025), began as a rock-ice avalanche with no glacial lake involved. 2. Body — why lake-centred management falls short — Explain that lakes can be mapped, drained and monitored, but slope failures can come from hundreds of thousands of deglaciating slopes with thawing permafrost. Use the ‘earthquake’ misreading and the 15 million people globally, nearly 3 million in India, facing GLOF danger to show that both hazards matter. 3. Body — early warning architecture — Propose a denser seismic network to detect landslide tremors and flood noise, cross-border data sharing through ICIMOD or bilateral arrangements, upstream warnings at hydropower sites, and community-based dissemination tied to Sendai Target G and NDMA’s 2020 GLOF guidelines. 4. Body — land use and hydropower — Discuss hazard zonation of debris fans and river terraces, worker safety at hydropower sites, cascading-hazard assessment in environmental clearance, and lessons from Joshimath. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that warnings save lives only when communities trust them, and that saving places requires decisions about where to build, making disaster risk reduction a development choice rather than only an emergency response.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are District Magistrate of a Himalayan district with three hydropower projects under construction. After Rasuwa, what will you do this week? Approach: I would convene the project managers, the district disaster authority and the police to review how an upstream alert reaches each tunnel and work site, and how quickly workers can be evacuated. I would require every project to install sirens, mark escape routes and hold a drill within a month. I would ensure that contractors maintain accurate lists of workers on site each day, since missing-person counts are otherwise impossible. I would also map settlements on river terraces and debris fans for a longer-term zonation exercise. Q2. As an NDMA official, you are asked whether India’s GLOF programme should be expanded to cover rock-ice avalanches. What would you advise? Approach: I would advise widening the programme into a high-mountain hazard programme, while keeping the lake work that remains necessary. The new element should be regional seismic and satellite monitoring of moving slopes, since site-by-site gauges cannot cover every valley. I would propose piloting a dense seismic network in one river basin with research partners and neighbouring countries. Community warning protocols should be designed alongside the technology, not after it. Q3. An interview board asks: should India stop building hydropower projects in the high Himalaya? Approach: A blanket halt would sacrifice clean, firm power and income that Himalayan States need. But the Chamoli and Rasuwa losses show that some sites are too exposed,



and projects must be sited and designed for cascading hazards, not just normal floods. I would support a basin-level risk assessment before new projects, strict worker safety standards and upstream warning systems for every project. Where the risk cannot be reduced, the project should not be built.

6. Health & Life Sciences

All three stories today are about the distance between a medicine on paper and a medicine in a patient's hand. On paper, India caps the prices of essential drugs, sells antibiotics only on prescription and releases every vaccine batch after government testing; in practice, a cancer drug carries ten times its trade price, antibiotics are bought across the counter, and a fake rabies vaccine reaches a wholesale market in the capital. The laws are old and mostly adequate. What fails is enforcement, and each story shows a different regulator — the price regulator, the drug regulator and the State drug controller — being asked to do the job it already has.

6.1 Supreme Court Calls Tenfold Markup on Cancer Drug 'Broad Daylight Dacoity', Faults Silent Regulators

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Supreme Court on Tuesday, September 22, expressed shock at the overpricing of essential cancer medicines, terming it a "broad daylight dacoity" against patients, The Hindu reports (PTI). The Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta noted that one drug carried a maximum retail price (MRP) of ₹27,000 although it was supplied to retailers for ₹2,700. "The MRP is 10 times the rate at which it is provided to the retailers. If this is not extortion, then what it is?" the Bench asked, adding: "It is very surprising that the authorities who are supposed to take action on this are silent." The court was hearing two petitions on drug-related issues, one of them seeking strict price control over medicines. The paper does not name the drug or the petitioners. The MRP is the highest legal selling price, printed on the pack by the company itself; the gap between it and the price to the retailer is the "trade margin" kept by the distribution chain. An Indian Express op-ed the same day by Abhay Shukla, national co-convenor of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, shows the same pattern in hospitals, citing Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner Tukaram Mundhe: a drip set that costs a hospital ₹11 carries a printed price of ₹325, and a syringe bought for under ₹7 is marked at ₹57. An audit of bills of critical patients in private hospitals across Maharashtra, facilitated by Jan Arogya Abhiyan, found that not one of 46 medicine brands was billed within the 10% markup on purchase price fixed during the pandemic; for nearly half, patients paid more than 150% above the hospital's cost, and the most common margin was 200-400%. In 2016, a Department of Pharmaceuticals committee chaired by Sudhansh Pant called high MRPs "a tool to cheat the helpless consumer" and recommended capping trade margins on all medicines and implants, price-controlled or not, at 35% to 50% depending on price. Ten years on, Mr. Shukla writes, only 18% of medicines are price-controlled. He asks for bills showing both the hospital's purchase price and its charge, statutory price control over all essential medicines and consumables through the Drug Price Control Order, and enforcement of the patient's right to buy medicines outside the hospital pharmacy. The syllabus link is GS2 on health and GS3 on pricing and consumer protection.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Drug prices are regulated only for listed essential medicines, while companies fix MRPs freely on the rest → trade margins grow to many times the cost as a sales incentive for retailers and hospitals → the 2016 Pant committee recommends a 35-50% cap on all medicines and implants, which is not adopted → patients, especially cancer patients and admitted patients who cannot shop around, pay the printed MRP → the Supreme Court calls a tenfold markup "dacoity" and asks why regulators are silent

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued under the Essential Commodities Act, not the drug law** — The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 (DPCO) is made by the Union government under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, which allows control of the production, supply and price of essential commodities. Its First Schedule lists "scheduled formulations", which are the medicines in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM); the current NLEM, of 2022, has 384 medicines. For these, a ceiling price is fixed as the simple average of the price to retailer of all brands with at least 1% market share, plus a 16% retailer margin, and the ceiling is revised every year in line with the Wholesale Price Index. For all other, "non-scheduled", formulations the company fixes its own MRP, but may raise it by no more than 10% in any twelve months.
- 2. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority enforces prices; it can also act beyond the essential list** — The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was set up in 1997 and is an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals in the Ministry

	of Chemicals and Fertilizers. It fixes ceiling prices under the DPCO, monitors prices of all medicines and recovers overcharged amounts from companies. Paragraph 19 of the DPCO lets the government fix or revise the price of any drug, scheduled or not, in extraordinary circumstances in the public interest. This power was used in 2019 to cap the trade margin at 30% on 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines, an approach known as trade margin rationalisation. 3. The Supreme Court has read a right to health into Article 21, and Article 47 makes public health a State duty — Article 47, a Directive Principle, says the State shall regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. The Supreme Court has held that the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to health and emergency medical care, notably in <i>Parmanand Katara v. Union of India</i> (1989) and <i>Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v. State of West Bengal</i> (1996). “Drugs and poisons” are Entry 19 of the Concurrent List, while “public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries” are Entry 6 of the State List. Pricing is therefore a Union matter, but regulating hospitals is largely for the States. 4. Consumer law and patients’ rights instruments give the patient a remedy against forced purchase — The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 defines “unfair trade practice” and provides a three-tier redressal system of District, State and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions. The Charter of Patients’ Rights prepared by the National Human Rights Commission, cited in the op-ed as the National Patients’ Rights Charter, includes the right to choose the source of medicines and tests. The printing of MRP on packages is required under the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011. The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana sells quality generic medicines through Jan Aushadhi Kendras as a market-side check on branded prices.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks about affordable health care; GS3 about pricing and regulation — The GS2 syllabus lists “issues relating to development and management of the social sector or services relating to health”. UPSC has repeatedly asked about universal health coverage and the burden of out-of-pocket spending, for which medicines are the largest single item. This story gives a concrete mechanism — the unregulated MRP — through which that burden is created, and a court’s statement that the regulator is silent. 2. Prelims tests the institutional map of drug pricing — Questions have been framed around which body fixes drug prices, under which law the price control order is issued, and what the NLEM is. The confusion between CDSCO (quality and approval, Health Ministry) and NPPA (prices, Department of Pharmaceuticals) is a classic trap, as is the fact that the DPCO flows from the Essential Commodities Act rather than the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. 3. Judicial activism in regulatory failure is a recurring Mains theme — The Bench’s remark that authorities “are silent” fits a larger pattern of the Supreme Court stepping in where regulators do not act. A Mains answer on judicial activism or on regulatory institutions can use this as a current example, with the caveat that courts can prod regulators but cannot run price control themselves.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 is issued by the Union government under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. ● Medicines listed in the National List of Essential Medicines are “scheduled formulations” under the DPCO, 2013, and their ceiling prices are fixed by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. ● The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, set up in 1997, is an attached

office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

- Under the DPCO, 2013, a manufacturer may not raise the MRP of a non-scheduled formulation by more than 10% in a period of twelve months.
- Paragraph 19 of the DPCO, 2013 allows the government to fix or revise the price of any drug in extraordinary circumstances in public interest; it was used in 2019 to rationalise trade margins on anti-cancer medicines.
- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- “Drugs and poisons” is Entry 19 of the Concurrent List, while “public health and sanitation; hospitals and dispensaries” is Entry 6 of the State List.

ANALYSIS

- 1. The problem is not a missing law but an unused one** — The DPCO already contains Paragraph 19, and NPPA already used it in 2019 to cap trade margins on cancer drugs. The Pant committee’s 35-50% cap was a recommendation to extend that model across the market, and it has not been adopted for a decade. So when the Bench says the authorities “are silent”, it is describing a policy choice rather than a gap in power. The court’s remarks raise the political cost of that silence, which is often what moves a ministry. The honest counter-view is that the paper does not tell us which cancer drug was involved, whether it is scheduled, or whether it falls under the 2019 cap, so the case may also reveal weak monitoring rather than absent rules.
- 2. A high MRP is a sales tool aimed at the seller, not the buyer** — Companies do not set a tenfold MRP expecting patients to shop around; they set it so that the retailer or hospital earns a large margin and therefore pushes that brand. This is why competition among brands can raise, rather than lower, the price paid by patients: the brands compete for the seller’s loyalty through margin. The patient, especially in cancer care or inside a hospital, has no bargaining power and often no time. A margin cap attacks this directly, because it removes the incentive to inflate the printed price. Price ceilings on the drug alone do not, as the Maharashtra consumables data show.
- 3. Only 18% coverage means price control protects a list, not a patient** — The NLEM is built for a primary and secondary care system, so many newer cancer drugs, implants and hospital consumables sit outside it. A patient admitted to a private hospital pays for dozens of items, most of them non-scheduled, and the savings on the few scheduled ones can be swamped by markups on the rest. The pandemic-era 10% markup cap in Maharashtra, which the audit found was breached for every one of 46 brands, shows that a cap without billing transparency is not self-enforcing. Mr. Shukla’s proposal of printing the purchase price beside the charge is cheap and makes every bill an inspection report.
- 4. The industry’s counter-argument deserves an answer, not dismissal** — Manufacturers argue that margins fund distribution to small towns, that price caps have led some companies to withdraw products or shift to non-scheduled combinations, and that aggressive control discourages investment in new drugs. There is some evidence that price control encourages such evasion, which is why a blanket margin cap is better than product-by-product ceilings: it leaves the base price to the company and only limits the markup. The 35-50% range recommended by the Pant committee already allows a reasonable distribution margin. The point is not to eliminate margins but to stop MRP being an arbitrary number.
- 5. Hospitals, a State subject, are the weakest link** — Pricing is a Union matter, but hospitals are regulated by States, and many States have not adopted the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010 or enforce it weakly. The right to buy medicines outside the hospital pharmacy exists in Maharashtra FDA orders of

	2016 and 2022 and has been upheld by the National Consumer Commission as a protection against unfair trade practice, yet patients rarely use it. A Union margin cap will reach retail pharmacies quickly, but hospital billing needs State FDAs to inspect bills. Without that pairing, the Supreme Court's remarks will change headlines but not invoices.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"The maximum retail price has become a tool to cheat the helpless consumer." In the light of recent judicial observations on the pricing of cancer medicines, examine the adequacy of India's drug price control framework and suggest reforms to protect patients from excessive trade margins. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the Supreme Court's September 22 remark that a cancer drug with an MRP of ₹27,000 supplied to retailers at ₹2,700 is "broad daylight dacoity", and that regulators are silent. Link to the right to health under Article 21 and Article 47. 2. Body — the framework — Explain the DPCO, 2013 under the Essential Commodities Act, the NLEM-based ceiling price, the 10% annual cap on non-scheduled drugs, NPPA's role and Paragraph 19, including the 2019 trade margin cap on 42 anti-cancer drugs. 3. Body — the gaps — Use the evidence: only 18% of medicines price-controlled, the 2016 Pant committee's unadopted 35-50% margin cap, the Maharashtra audit showing 200-400% margins and none of 46 brands within the 10% cap, and consumables such as a ₹11 drip set priced at ₹325. Note the Union-State split between pricing and hospital regulation. 4. Body — reforms — Propose a trade margin cap across all medicines and consumables, dual price disclosure on hospital bills, enforcement of the right to buy outside the hospital pharmacy, stronger State Clinical Establishments regulation and expansion of Jan Aushadhi. Acknowledge the industry's concern about supply and innovation, and argue that margin caps are less distorting than product ceilings. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India's problem is less the absence of power than its non-use, and that transparent margins are the cheapest way to lower out-of-pocket spending on medicines.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As Chairperson of the NPPA, you are asked by the Supreme Court why the authority has not acted against a tenfold markup on a cancer drug. What do you do? Approach: I would first establish the facts: whether the drug is scheduled, whether it falls under the 2019 trade margin cap, and whether the 10% annual limit on MRP increases has been breached. If there is a breach, recovery of overcharged amounts with interest should begin at once. If there is none, I would place before the Department of Pharmaceuticals a proposal to use Paragraph 19 to extend margin rationalisation to all anti-cancer medicines, with data on price-to-retailer and MRP gaps. The court deserves a plan with timelines, not an explanation of limits. Q2. As a District Collector, you receive complaints that private hospitals force patients to buy medicines only from their own pharmacies at MRP. How do you respond? Approach: I would direct the district drug inspector and the Chief Medical Officer to inspect hospital pharmacies and check bills against purchase invoices where the law permits. I would require hospitals to display prominently that patients may buy medicines from any licensed pharmacy, and publicise the nearest Jan Aushadhi Kendra. Patients would be told how to approach the District Consumer Commission. Where the State has a clinical establishments law, repeated violations would be grounds for action under it.

Q3. An interview board asks: is it fair to cap profits in a private industry that India also wants to grow as the 'pharmacy of the world'?

Approach: Medicines are not ordinary goods, because the buyer does not choose the product, often cannot delay the purchase and frequently cannot judge quality. A cap on trade margins does not cap the manufacturer's price or its export earnings; it limits the markup between factory and patient. India's pharmaceutical strength lies in low-cost generics, and a domestic market in which patients are overcharged damages the sector's legitimacy. A reasonable, predictable margin cap is fairer to both industry and patients than sudden product-level price controls.

6.2 CDSCO Circular Warns Against Self-Medication With Antibiotics and Painkillers, Citing Risk of Kidney Damage

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), India's national drug regulator, has cautioned against the indiscriminate or prolonged use of painkillers and antibiotics, citing the associated risk of kidney damage, The Hindu reports. In a circular dated September 21, the regulator said that non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and antibiotics are regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Drugs Rules, 1945, and should be sold only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner. It advised the public not to self-medicate with antibiotics and not to use them for conditions where they are not clinically indicated, including most uncomplicated viral infections. The paper does not say which specific drugs, retailers or incidents prompted the circular. Some terms need explaining. NSAIDs are the common class of painkillers and fever-reducers that act by blocking inflammation; they are widely sold without any prescription in practice. Antibiotics are drugs that kill bacteria or stop their growth; they have no effect on viruses, which is why the regulator singles out viral infections such as the common cold as cases where they are not indicated. "Self-medication" means taking medicine without a doctor's advice, often on the pharmacist's suggestion or from an old prescription. Kidney damage matters because the kidneys clear many drugs from the body, and certain painkillers and antibiotics are known to be harmful to kidneys when used for long periods or in high doses. The second, larger concern behind any warning on antibiotics is antimicrobial resistance (AMR): when bacteria are repeatedly exposed to antibiotics that are taken without need or taken incompletely, the resistant strains survive and multiply, so that common infections become harder and costlier to treat. The circular is a reminder of an existing legal rule rather than a new one — the requirement of a prescription already exists for these medicines. Its significance lies in the gap it admits between that rule and the practice at India's chemist counters. The syllabus link is GS2 on health, and GS3 on science and technology in everyday life and on biotechnology-related public health risks.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Antibiotics and painkillers are placed on prescription-only schedules under the Drugs Rules → weak enforcement at lakhs of retail pharmacies and costly doctor visits make over-the-counter purchase routine → patients use antibiotics for viral illnesses and painkillers for long periods → the public health costs show up as drug-resistant infections and drug-induced kidney harm → CDSCO issues a circular on September 21 reminding the public and sellers of the prescription rule

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. CDSCO is the central drug regulator, but most retail enforcement lies with the States** — The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, headed by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), functions under the Directorate General of Health Services in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It approves new drugs and clinical trials, regulates imports, and licenses certain categories such as vaccines and blood products jointly with the States. Licences to manufacture most drugs and to sell drugs at wholesale and retail are granted and enforced by State drug controllers. A CDSCO advisory on retail sale therefore depends on State drug inspectors for its effect.
- 2. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 sorts medicines into schedules that decide how they may be sold** — The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is the parent law on the import, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs; the rules under it, earlier called the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, were renamed the Drugs Rules, 1945 after

cosmetics got separate rules in 2020. Schedule H lists drugs that may be sold at retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner and must carry the “Rx” symbol and a warning. Schedule H1, in force since 2014, covers higher-generation antibiotics, anti-tuberculosis drugs and certain habit-forming drugs; the chemist must keep a separate register of such sales, with the prescriber’s and patient’s details, for three years. India has no statutory definition of “over-the-counter” drugs, so anything outside the prescription schedules can in effect be sold without one.

3. **Antimicrobial resistance is treated globally as a One Health problem** — Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites evolve so that medicines no longer work against them. The World Health Assembly adopted a Global Action Plan on AMR in 2015, and the UN General Assembly held high-level meetings on AMR in 2016 and 2024; the 2024 political declaration set a target of reducing global deaths associated with AMR by 10% by 2030. The WHO’s AWaRe classification divides antibiotics into Access, Watch and Reserve groups, with Reserve drugs kept as a last resort. AMR is a One Health problem because antibiotic use in animals, poultry, aquaculture and the environment feeds resistance in humans.
4. **India’s National Action Plan on AMR builds on earlier campaigns** — India launched its National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR) in 2017, aligned with the Global Action Plan, with strategic priorities on awareness, surveillance, infection prevention, optimised use of antimicrobials, research and international collaboration. The Health Ministry’s “Medicines with the Red Line” campaign of 2016 asked people not to use medicines whose pack carries a vertical red line, which marks prescription-only antibiotics, without a doctor’s advice. The Chennai Declaration of 2012, by medical societies, was an early professional call for a national AMR policy. ICMR runs the Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance and Research Network of laboratories that tracks resistance trends.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

1. **AMR is a standing GS2 and GS3 theme** — UPSC has asked in Mains about the causes of antibiotic resistance in India and the measures needed to contain it, and in Prelims about the misuse of antibiotics and the reasons for resistance. The CDSCO circular is a fresh peg for an answer, because it names both drivers — self-medication and use for viral infections — in a regulator’s own words.
2. **Regulatory architecture of drugs is a recurring Prelims area** — Questions test the distinction between the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and other laws, the role of the DCGI and CDSCO, and what Schedule H and H1 mean. The renaming of the rules as the Drugs Rules, 1945 and the separate Cosmetics Rules, 2020 is the kind of detail a statement-based question can use.
3. **Governance angle: a law on paper, weak at the counter** — GS2 includes government policies and issues arising from their implementation. The prescription-only rule is a textbook example of a well-designed law that fails at the last mile, and it lets a candidate discuss State capacity, the number of drug inspectors and the role of behaviour change.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation is headed by the Drugs Controller General of India and functions under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Drugs listed in Schedule H of the Drugs Rules, 1945 may be sold at retail only on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.
- Schedule H1 covers certain higher-generation antibiotics, anti-tuberculosis drugs and habit-forming drugs, and requires chemists to maintain a separate register of their sale.

	● Antibiotics act against bacteria and are not effective against viral infections. ● The WHO AWaRe classification groups antibiotics into Access, Watch and Reserve categories. ● India's first National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance was launched in 2017. ● Under the "Medicines with the Red Line" campaign, a vertical red line on a medicine's pack indicates that it should not be used without a doctor's prescription.
ANALYSIS	1. A circular that restates the law is also an admission that the law is not working — Nothing in the September 21 circular is new law: NSAIDs and antibiotics were already prescription-only. When a regulator reminds the public of an existing rule, it signals that enforcement at the point of sale has failed. The rational next step would be inspections, penalties and audits of Schedule H1 registers by State drug controllers, not only public advice. The counter-view is that awareness is itself an intervention in a country where many people genuinely do not know that antibiotics do not treat viral illness. Both are true, but advice without enforcement tends to fade within a news cycle. 2. Self-medication is often a rational response to the cost of seeing a doctor — For a daily-wage worker, a visit to a doctor can mean a lost day's earnings, a queue and a fee, while a chemist is a few steps away and will suggest a medicine for free. Seen this way, over-the-counter antibiotic use is a symptom of weak primary care, not only of ignorance. Strict enforcement without better access could push people towards unlicensed sellers or delay care. That is why the Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and teleconsultation are part of the AMR answer: they lower the cost of getting a prescription honestly. 3. Kidney harm is the immediate risk; resistance is the collective one — The circular leads with kidney damage, which is a harm to the individual user and therefore more persuasive to the public. Resistance is different: it is a harm to everyone, created by each person's use, which makes it a classic negative externality. People do not weigh a cost that falls on others, so information alone will under-correct the behaviour. This is the economic case for regulation of sale rather than reliance on individual choice. The framing of the circular is smart communication, but policy has to address the externality. 4. The absence of an over-the-counter category makes enforcement harder, not easier — Because India has no legal list of medicines that may be sold freely, the line between what a chemist may and may not sell without a prescription is blurred in practice. A formal over-the-counter list of safe, low-risk medicines, with clear labelling and dose limits, would let enforcement focus on the prescription categories that matter. Many countries use such a two-tier system. The risk is that a badly drawn list could legitimise the casual sale of painkillers, which the circular itself warns about, so dose and pack-size limits would be essential. 5. Human use is only half of the antibiotic problem — The circular is addressed to people, but antibiotics are also used in poultry, dairy and fish farming, often as growth promoters, and residues from manufacturing reach rivers. Under a One Health approach, a campaign aimed only at patients treats one tap while others run. India has taken some steps on animal-use antibiotics, but monitoring is thin. A credible AMR strategy needs the Health, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Environment ministries working to a common plan, which is what the National Action Plan envisaged.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	Antimicrobial resistance in India is driven as much by the ease of buying antibiotics as by the lack of new ones. Discuss the regulatory and health-system reasons behind the

	misuse of antibiotics in India, and suggest a One Health strategy to contain antimicrobial resistance. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Begin with the CDSCO circular of September 21 warning against self-medication with antibiotics and painkillers, noting that these are already prescription-only under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Drugs Rules, 1945. Define AMR in one line. 2. Body — regulatory causes — Explain Schedule H and H1, the dual Centre-State structure in which State drug controllers enforce retail sale, the shortage of inspectors, the absence of a legal over-the-counter category, and weak auditing of H1 registers. 3. Body — health-system and social causes — Discuss the cost of accessing a doctor, informal providers, patient demand for quick cures, use of antibiotics for viral infections, incomplete courses, and antibiotic use in animal husbandry and aquaculture. 4. Body — a One Health strategy — Propose enforcement of prescription rules with digital records of H1 sales, stewardship in hospitals using the WHO AWaRe classification, stronger primary care and teleconsultation, surveillance through ICMR's network, limits on non-therapeutic use in animals, and control of pharmaceutical effluents, as envisaged in NAP-AMR 2017. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that awareness circulars are necessary but not sufficient, and that AMR is a shared-resource problem requiring coordinated action across ministries and States.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a State Drugs Controller, how would you give effect to the CDSCO circular in your State? Approach: I would order a time-bound drive by drug inspectors to check Schedule H1 registers and prescription records at retail pharmacies, starting with high-volume outlets. First violations would draw warnings and training; repeated ones would lead to suspension of licences under the Drugs Rules. I would work with chemists' associations so that compliance becomes a professional norm rather than a policing exercise. Monthly data on inspections and actions would be published so the drive does not quietly end. Q2. As a District Health Officer, how would you reduce antibiotic misuse without denying poor patients timely treatment? Approach: The aim is to make a legitimate prescription easier to get than an illegal sale. I would expand teleconsultation at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and extend OPD hours so that daily-wage workers can see a doctor. Community health workers would carry simple messages, such as that antibiotics do not treat colds. I would also audit antibiotic prescribing in government facilities, because doctors' practice is as much a driver as self-medication. Q3. An interview board asks: should the government simply ban the sale of antibiotics by private chemists? Approach: A ban would move sales underground and hurt rural patients who rely on the local chemist, often the only health outlet nearby. The better approach is to enforce the existing prescription requirement, digitise records of sales of higher-generation antibiotics and restrict Reserve-category drugs to hospitals. Pharmacists should be treated as partners in stewardship, with training and accountability. Regulation should target the riskiest drugs most tightly rather than all antibiotics equally.

6.3 Delhi Seizes 481 Counterfeit Abhayrab Rabies Vaccine Units, Traces Supply to Kanpur Agency

THE NEWS New Delhi. The Delhi Drugs Control (DDC) Department has seized counterfeit rabies vaccine worth ₹2 lakh from a firm in Central Delhi's Bhagirath Palace and traced the supply to an agency in Kanpur, a Delhi government release said on Monday, September 21, The Indian Express reports. Raids at three premises of the firm, on the direction of Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh, led to the seizure of 481 units of Purified Vero Cell Rabies Vaccine sold under the brand name Abhayrab. The original manufacturer, Human Biologicals Institute, Telangana — the human health and vaccine division of Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL) — confirmed that the batch was counterfeit and had not been released by the company. Of the seized stock, 120 vials were collected as legal samples and sent for testing to the Central Research Institute (CRI), Kasauli; the remaining 361 units, along with seven purchase invoices, were seized under relevant sections of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. The firm told investigators it had sourced the vaccine from a Kanpur agency; the Uttar Pradesh State Drug Department then raided two locations, including the agency's premises, and confirmed it as the source. The DDC Department is now tracing the distribution network. "Rabies is a fatal and serious disease, and we cannot compromise on the quality of the vaccine," Mr. Singh said, promising action "even against suppliers outside Delhi". On August 27, the Drugs Controller General of India had written to all State drug control departments asking them to step up vigilance on the movement, distribution and availability of a misbranded vaccine batch. IIL has said every batch of Abhayrab undergoes independent government testing before release, and that vaccines supplied through authorised channels, including hospitals and licensed pharmacies, remain unaffected. A "Vero cell" vaccine is made by growing the virus in a standard laboratory cell line and inactivating it. A counterfeit vaccine is especially dangerous because rabies vaccine is given after an animal bite, when the person has no second chance: once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal. The paper recalls a 2025 study by the Indian Council of Medical Research, published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases and based on a survey of nearly 79,000 households, which estimated 5,726 human rabies deaths in India each year. The syllabus link is GS2 on health and GS3 on the regulation of pharmaceuticals.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Rabies vaccine is needed urgently after dog bites and is in steady demand across public and private channels → gaps between licensed supply chains and wholesale markets let unreleased, fake batches enter trade → the DCGI alerts all States on August 27 about a misbranded batch → Delhi's drug controller raids a Bhagirath Palace firm and seizes 481 units, which the manufacturer confirms are counterfeit → Uttar Pradesh's drug department traces the source to a Kanpur agency, showing that inter-State coordination is the only way to follow the chain

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Rabies is a dog-mediated zoonosis that is fatal once symptoms appear but fully preventable** — Rabies is a viral disease caused by a Lyssavirus and transmitted to humans mainly through the bite or scratch of an infected animal; dogs account for the overwhelming majority of human cases in India. Once clinical symptoms appear, it is virtually always fatal, but timely post-exposure prophylaxis prevents it. Under WHO guidelines, exposures are graded into three categories, and the most severe (Category III) require wound washing, rabies vaccine and rabies immunoglobulin. Because the window for effective prevention is short, the quality of the vaccine at the moment of use decides life or death.
- 2. India aims to end dog-mediated rabies deaths by 2030 through a One Health plan** — The WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control launched the "Zero by 30" global strategic plan in 2018 to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030. India launched its National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination (NAPRE) by 2030 on World Rabies Day, September 28, 2021. The National Rabies Control Programme, run by the National Centre for Disease Control, covers the human side, including the supply of vaccine and immunoglobulin in public facilities. The animal side rests on mass dog vaccination and the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- 3. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act defines spurious and misbranded drugs and punishes them severely** — Section 17 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines a misbranded drug, Section 17A an adulterated drug and Section 17B a spurious drug —

	one that imitates or substitutes for another drug, or falsely bears the name of another manufacturer. Section 18 prohibits the manufacture and sale of such drugs. Under Section 27, as amended in 2008, manufacturing or selling a spurious or adulterated drug that is likely to cause death or grievous hurt is punishable with imprisonment of not less than ten years, which may extend to life, and a fine of not less than ₹10 lakh or three times the value of the drugs confiscated, whichever is more. “Counterfeit” is the everyday word; “spurious” is the legal one. 4. Vaccines pass through central lot release at the Central Research Institute, Kasauli — The Central Research Institute, Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh, established in 1905, functions under the Directorate General of Health Services and serves as the Central Drugs Laboratory for vaccines and sera. Every batch (lot) of a vaccine must be tested and released by it before it can be sold, which is the “independent government testing” IIL refers to. Manufacturing licences for vaccines are granted by State licensing authorities with the approval of the DCGI as the Central Licence Approving Authority, an example of the Centre-State “dual control” in drug regulation. Retail and wholesale sale licences, and raids such as Delhi’s, are the business of State drug controllers.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Neglected tropical diseases and zoonoses are recurring GS2 and GS3 themes — UPSC has asked about zoonotic diseases, the One Health approach and India’s elimination targets for diseases such as tuberculosis, kala-azar and lymphatic filariasis. Rabies, with a 2030 elimination goal and a large burden estimated by ICMR, fits this pattern, and a question on why India has struggled to eliminate it is plausible. 2. Spurious drugs and regulatory capacity recur in Mains — Drug quality has become a regular issue after contaminated cough syrup deaths and repeated seizures of fake medicines. This case adds a vaccine, which moves the question from consumer protection to public health, and a clean example of inter-State coordination between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. 3. Prelims draws on institutions such as CRI Kasauli and on disease basics — Facts such as the causative agent of rabies, the vaccine production platform, the role of CRI Kasauli, and the year and target of NAPRE are exam-pattern material. Statement questions on which body grants vaccine licences also test the dual-control structure.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Rabies is caused by a virus of the genus <i>Lyssavirus</i> and is transmitted to humans mainly through the bites of infected dogs. ● India’s National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination by 2030 was launched on World Rabies Day, September 28, 2021. ● The global “Zero by 30” plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies was launched jointly by the WHO, FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control. ● Section 17B of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 defines a “spurious drug”. ● The Central Research Institute, Kasauli serves as the Central Drugs Laboratory for testing and lot release of vaccines and sera in India. ● Licences to manufacture vaccines are granted by State licensing authorities with the approval of the Drugs Controller General of India acting as the Central Licence Approving Authority. ● The Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 are framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
ANALYSIS	1. A fake vaccine is worse than a fake pill because it fails silently — A spurious painkiller usually reveals itself when the pain does not go; a spurious rabies vaccine gives no signal at all until the disease appears, and by then nothing can be done. The victim may

never be counted as a counterfeit case, because the death will be recorded as rabies. This makes counterfeit vaccines a hidden contributor to the 5,726 annual deaths estimated by ICMR. It also means post-market surveillance of vaccines cannot rely on complaints, as it does for many drugs, and must rely on supply-chain checks.

2. **The August 27 alert shows the system worked late, not early** — The DCGI wrote to all States about a misbranded batch almost four weeks before the Delhi seizure, and the manufacturer has confirmed the Delhi stock was never released. The alert thus did lead to action, which is to the credit of the regulators. But the stock had already reached a wholesale market in the capital, and the DDC is still tracing where else it went. The question an auditor would ask is how many doses were sold before the seizure, and whether patients who received them can be traced for re-vaccination. The paper does not answer this, and the public deserves to know.
3. **Lot release protects the factory gate, not the supply chain** — IIL correctly says every genuine batch is tested before release; but a counterfeit batch never passes through that gate at all. The weakness is downstream: purchases between wholesalers on invoices, which is how the Bhagirath Palace firm bought from Kanpur. Unique identifiers and track-and-trace systems, of the kind India has mandated through QR codes for active pharmaceutical ingredients and for top-selling brands under Schedule H2, are the logical extension. Extending verifiable codes to vaccines sold through private channels would let a pharmacist check authenticity in seconds.
4. **Inter-State coordination is the real test of dual control** — Delhi seized the stock, Uttar Pradesh raided the source, and the DCGI issued the national alert: three regulators acted, and the chain was found. This is dual control working as intended, but it depended on the firm naming its supplier and on informal cooperation. There is no single real-time national database of seizures and suspect batches that all State drug controllers use. A shared platform, maintained by CDSCO, would turn a one-off success into routine practice. Uniform capacity also matters: many States have far fewer drug inspectors than their pharmacies require.
5. **Rabies elimination cannot be won on the vaccine side alone** — The burden of 5,726 deaths is a result of dog bites, and NAPRE rests on mass dog vaccination and population management as much as on post-exposure prophylaxis. Every counterfeit dose weakens the human-side safety net precisely because the animal side is slow. Public facilities supplying free vaccine reduce the pull towards private purchase, where counterfeit stock is more likely to enter. Keeping stocks full in government health centres is therefore both a public health measure and an anti-counterfeiting measure.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION

The recent seizure of counterfeit rabies vaccine in Delhi exposes weaknesses in India's pharmaceutical supply chain. Examine the gaps in the regulation of drug and vaccine quality under India's Centre-State framework, and suggest measures to protect patients, in the context of the goal of eliminating dog-mediated rabies by 2030. (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

1. **Introduction** — Begin with the seizure of 481 units of counterfeit Abhayrab by the Delhi Drugs Control Department, traced to Kanpur, and the ICMR estimate of 5,726 rabies deaths a year. State that rabies is fully preventable yet almost always fatal once symptoms appear.
2. **Body — the regulatory framework** — Explain the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 definitions of spurious and misbranded drugs, the penalties under Section 27, lot release at CRI Kasauli, and dual control between CDSCO and State drug controllers, using the DCGI's August 27 alert and the Delhi-UP cooperation as examples.
3. **Body — gaps** — Identify the gaps: invoice-based trade among wholesalers, absence of track-and-trace for vaccines in private channels, uneven State inspection capacity, lack

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

of a shared national database of seizures and suspect batches, and difficulty in tracing patients who received fake doses.

4. Body — measures and rabies elimination — Propose QR-code verification for vaccines, a CDSCO-run national alert and seizure platform, more drug inspectors, assured free vaccine supply in public facilities, and linkage with NAPRE's One Health approach, including dog vaccination under the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023.

5. Conclusion — Conclude that the elimination target of 2030 depends on public trust in the vaccine, and that supply-chain integrity is as essential as coverage.

Q1. As Delhi's Drugs Controller, what would be your priorities in the week after this seizure?

Approach: My first priority would be patients: identify through invoices which clinics and pharmacies bought from the firm and alert them, so that people who may have received doses can be advised by doctors on re-vaccination. Second, I would complete the investigation with Uttar Pradesh to reach the manufacturer of the fake stock, not just the traders. Third, I would inspect other wholesalers in Bhagirath Palace for the same batch numbers. Prosecution under Section 27 should follow with a strong evidentiary record, including the CRI Kasauli test reports.

Q2. As a District Collector, how would you ensure that rabies vaccine in your district is both available and genuine?

Approach: I would make sure every community and primary health centre keeps adequate stock of vaccine and immunoglobulin from government supply, because shortages drive patients to private purchase. I would ask the drug inspector to check private stocks against batch lists issued by the manufacturer and by the DCGI. A helpline for dog-bite victims would direct them to the nearest facility. On the animal side, I would coordinate with the municipal body and veterinary department on dog vaccination drives.

Q3. An interview board asks: should traders of spurious life-saving drugs be denied bail as a rule?

Approach: The law already treats spurious drugs likely to cause death as a grave offence with a minimum of ten years' imprisonment, which reflects the seriousness of the harm. But blanket denial of bail sits uneasily with the presumption of innocence and with the Supreme Court's view that bail is the rule. The better answer is speedy trials through designated courts and strong investigation, so that the guilty are convicted quickly. Certainty of punishment deters more than its severity.

7. Science & Technology

Artificial intelligence is now reshaping two things at once: the physical industry that builds its hardware and the global debate on how to govern it. The money is flowing to a handful of memory and packaging firms in Korea, Taiwan and the United States, and India, for now, sits at the assembly and design end of that chain. At the United Nations, the scientists asked to advise governments are pushing back against fear-driven talk and asking for evidence. For India the lesson is the same on both fronts: a seat at the table comes from capability, not from enthusiasm.

7.1 AI Data-Centre Boom Drives a Memory-Chip ‘Supercycle’ While India Stays in Packaging and Design

THE NEWS New Delhi. Semicon India, the flagship conference of the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) under the IT Ministry, was held in New Delhi last week amid exceptional AI-driven demand for chips, writes Shruti Mittal of Carnegie India in The Indian Express. Some call this a semiconductor “supercycle” — a multi-year boom in investment caused by a fundamental technology shift, as with computers in the 1990s and smartphones in the 2010s. The demand comes largely from AI data centres, buildings full of servers whose key part is the AI chip, or accelerator, that runs the massive calculations of AI models. Such a processor is only as fast as the data fed to it, and ordinary memory sits too far away. High-bandwidth memory (HBM) solves this by stacking layers of working memory close to the processor, joined using advanced packaging — not the box, but the engineering that connects chips to each other. Three firms dominate HBM: South Korea’s SK Hynix and Samsung, and Micron of the United States. Citing S&P Global, the article says Microsoft, Amazon, Google and Meta plan to spend nearly \$635 billion on AI infrastructure in 2026 alone. Chipmakers are signing long-term “take-or-pay” contracts, under which buyers must take the agreed chips whatever their current demand or pay heavy penalties. Ms. Mittal cautions that this spending is concentrated in a few firms. India does not produce chips: under ISM 1.0 it approved 12 projects and some packaging units have begun production, and Micron’s Sanand plant in Gujarat will process imported wafers. A July parliamentary reply said AI demand was tightening memory supply and raising prices, and some foreign investment withdrawals in 2026 have been linked to Taiwan and South Korea. ISM 2.0, launched in February, supports packaging and, through a separate scheme, research on chiplets — small specialised chips combined in place of one large piece of silicon. Nearly a fifth of the global chip workforce is in India; under the design-linked incentive scheme, startup Netrasemi is building edge-AI processors for cameras and drones, and Infineon has acquired the Bengaluru fabless firm C2i. Separately, The Hindu (AFP) reports that at a September 21 event on the UN General Assembly sidelines, members of the UN’s International Scientific Panel on AI, created in 2025, warned against “investing in fear”. The syllabus link is GS3 on science and technology and indigenisation of technology.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Generative AI models need vast computation → big technology firms pour nearly \$635 billion into AI data centres in 2026 → accelerators need memory placed right beside them, so demand for HBM and advanced packaging soars and chipmakers lock in take-or-pay contracts → memory supply tightens, prices rise and investors chase Taiwan and Korea → India, strong in design talent and building assembly and packaging under ISM 1.0 and 2.0, is still outside the most profitable layer of the chain

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. A chip passes through three stages, and India so far works in the first and the last —**
The semiconductor value chain has three broad stages: design, in which engineers plan the circuit using electronic design automation software and licensed intellectual property; fabrication, in which the circuit is printed on silicon wafers in a “fab” or foundry; and assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP), also called outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT), in which the finished wafer is cut, packaged and tested. A “fabless” company designs and sells chips but outsources manufacturing, a “foundry” manufactures for others, and an integrated device manufacturer does both. Fabrication is the most capital-intensive stage, requiring billions of dollars and advanced equipment. India has long had a deep chip-design workforce, largely working for global firms, and is now adding ATMP and OSAT capacity.
- 2. High-bandwidth memory is a stack of DRAM chips built beside the processor —**
Computers use two main kinds of memory: DRAM, the fast “working memory” that holds data while it is being processed and loses it when power is switched off, and

	NAND flash, which stores data permanently. HBM is made by stacking several DRAM dies vertically and linking them with tiny vertical connections called through-silicon vias. The stack is then placed next to the processor on a thin base layer called an interposer, an arrangement often described as 2.5D packaging. The short distance and very wide connection allow far more data per second than conventional memory, which is why HBM has become essential for AI accelerators. 3. Chiplets break one big chip into smaller specialised ones joined by packaging — A conventional chip is built as one piece of silicon, called a monolithic die; as dies grow larger, a single defect can spoil the whole chip, raising cost and waste. The chiplet approach splits the design into smaller dies, each made on the process best suited to it, and joins them in one package. This makes advanced packaging, rather than only smaller transistors, a source of performance gains, which matters as the pace predicted by Moore's Law slows. An industry standard for connecting chiplets from different makers, Universal Chiplet Interconnect Express (UCIe), was launched in 2022. 4. The Semicon India programme and the India Semiconductor Mission — The Union Cabinet approved the Semicon India programme in December 2021 with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore to develop a semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem. The India Semiconductor Mission, a specialised unit under the Digital India Corporation of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, runs it. The programme has schemes for semiconductor fabs, display fabs, compound semiconductors and ATMP/OSAT units, and the Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme, which supports domestic chip-design firms and startups with financial incentives and design infrastructure. Separately, the IndiaAI Mission was approved in March 2024 to build compute capacity, datasets and AI applications.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS3 covers indigenisation of technology and investment in industry — UPSC has asked about India's semiconductor ambitions, the obstacles to building fabs, and the role of design versus manufacturing. This article gives the vocabulary — supercycle, HBM, chiplets, take-or-pay, fabless — and a clear-eyed picture of where India stands in the chain, which is more useful than any single investment announcement. 2. Global AI governance is entering GS2 international institutions — Questions on the governance of emerging technologies, AI and data have appeared in both GS2 and GS3. The UN's International Scientific Panel on AI, created in 2025, is a new institution a Prelims statement question could test, along with India's role in the AI summit series and its own IndiaAI safety agenda. 3. Economic geography of technology is a GS1 and essay theme — The concentration of HBM in three firms and of advanced packaging in East Asia is a lesson in the geography of strategic industries. Essay topics on technology and sovereignty, and GS1 questions on the location of industries, can draw on how a single technological shift redistributes investment between countries.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● High-bandwidth memory (HBM) is made by stacking DRAM dies vertically and placing the stack close to the processor using advanced packaging. ● DRAM is volatile working memory that loses data when power is switched off, while NAND flash is non-volatile storage memory. ● A fabless semiconductor company designs and sells chips but outsources their fabrication to foundries. ● ATMP stands for assembly, testing, marking and packaging, the back-end stage of semiconductor manufacturing that follows wafer fabrication. ● The Semicon India programme, approved in December 2021 with an outlay of ₹76,000 crore, is implemented through the India Semiconductor Mission under

the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

- The Design Linked Incentive scheme under the Semicon India programme supports domestic companies and startups engaged in semiconductor design.
- Chiplet architecture combines multiple smaller dies within a single package instead of building one large monolithic die.

ANALYSIS

- 1. India is riding the supercycle at its lowest-margin stage, and that is a reasonable place to start** — In a boom, profits collect where supply is scarcest, and today that is HBM and advanced packaging controlled by a handful of firms in Korea, Taiwan and the United States. India's packaging plants, processing imported wafers, will earn service fees rather than the rents of scarcity. Critics see this as low-value assembly dressed up as a chip industry. But packaging is no longer simple back-end work: with HBM and chiplets, the package is where performance is won, and ISM 2.0's packaging and chiplet R&D schemes point India towards the part of the back end that is becoming high-value. The test is whether Indian plants move from conventional packaging to advanced packaging within this cycle, not whether India builds a leading-edge fab.
- 2. A supercycle is also a trap for late entrants** — Supercycles end, and semiconductors have a long history of booms followed by gluts and price crashes. Take-or-pay contracts protect today's leaders, who can plan capacity against guaranteed buyers, while new entrants build plants that may come on stream after demand has peaked. Ms. Mittal's warning that the industry depends on the revenue AI services actually earn is the key risk: if AI spending by four firms slows, memory prices can fall sharply. India should therefore invest where its advantage lasts through the cycle — design talent and packaging skills — rather than chase the most cyclical capacity at the top of the market.
- 3. The boom already costs India something, through prices and capital** — The July parliamentary reply noting that AI demand is tightening memory supply and raising prices shows that India, a large importer of electronics, pays for the supercycle through costlier devices and servers, including those needed for its own AI mission. The foreign portfolio outflows linked to Taiwan and Korea show capital chasing the cycle's winners. This is the capital side of the four factors of production: the supercycle is reallocating global investment towards countries that hold scarce semiconductor capacity. The counter-view is that such flows are cyclical and will reverse; but a country without a stake in the cycle's scarce layer will keep facing the same pattern each time.
- 4. Design is India's strongest card, but ownership of design is the gap** — Nearly a fifth of the global chip workforce is in India, but much of that talent designs chips owned by foreign companies. The DLI scheme and startups such as Netrasemi, building edge-AI processors for cameras and drones, are attempts to create Indian-owned intellectual property. Infineon's acquisition of the Bengaluru fabless firm C2i cuts both ways: it validates Indian design capability, but also shows how successful Indian design firms can end up in foreign hands. A policy that funds startups without a path to scale may end up training acquisition targets, which is not a failure, but is not sovereignty either.
- 5. The UN panel's call for evidence is also India's best position in AI governance** — At the September 21 event, Google DeepMind's Joelle Barral said that "investing in fear is not that helpful", and panel co-chair Yoshua Bengio stressed separating what is known about AI risks from what can only be "plausibly extrapolated", even as some former AI lab employees have spoken of catastrophic risk and PauseAI UK protested outside Downing Street. An evidence-first approach suits India, which wants AI adopted widely for development and fears that rules written around speculative existential risk could lock in the advantage of a few frontier labs. The counter-view is that waiting for evidence of catastrophic harm may be waiting too long. India's credible middle path is

	to build its own testing and safety capacity, so that it contributes evidence rather than only consuming others' conclusions.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“The AI-driven semiconductor supercycle is redistributing capital and capability across the world.” In this context, assess India’s position in the global semiconductor value chain and suggest how it can move into higher-value segments such as advanced packaging and chip design. (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Define a supercycle as a multi-year investment boom caused by a structural technology shift, as with computers in the 1990s and smartphones in the 2010s. Note that AI data centres, with about \$635 billion planned by four firms in 2026, are driving demand for accelerators and high-bandwidth memory. 2. Body — how the value chain is changing — Explain HBM and chiplets in simple terms and show that advanced packaging has become a source of value. Mention the concentration of HBM in SK Hynix, Samsung and Micron, and take-or-pay contracts that favour incumbents. 3. Body — India’s position — Describe the Semicon India programme and ISM 1.0 with 12 approved projects, focused on ATMP/OSAT; Micron’s Sanand unit processing imported wafers; the design workforce; and the DLI scheme. Note the costs: tighter memory supply, higher prices, and portfolio outflows towards Taiwan and Korea. 4. Body — moving up — Suggest a shift from conventional to advanced packaging under ISM 2.0, chiplet R&D, Indian-owned design IP, retention of design startups through patient capital, skills in materials and equipment, and partnerships with trusted countries. Warn against building cyclical capacity at the peak of a boom. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that India should aim to be indispensable in a few segments — design and advanced packaging — rather than present in all, so that the next cycle finds it holding scarce capability.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. As a Joint Secretary in MeitY handling ISM 2.0, how would you decide between subsidising another conventional packaging plant and funding chiplet research? Approach: I would look at where India can be scarce rather than simply present. Conventional packaging capacity is growing worldwide and earns thin margins, while advanced packaging and chiplet integration are the bottlenecks of the AI cycle. I would tie support for any new plant to a roadmap towards advanced packaging, and fund chiplet research through consortia of industry and academic institutions with clear milestones. Public money should buy capability that lasts beyond the current boom. Q2. As an officer in the Department of Economic Affairs, how would you respond to portfolio outflows linked to the chip boom in Taiwan and Korea? Approach: I would treat such outflows as a signal about sectoral opportunity rather than a verdict on India’s macro stability. Short-term capital follows the cycle, and India cannot and should not try to stop it with controls. The durable response is to make India an investable destination in the same sectors, through stable policy, faster approvals and a pipeline of listed technology firms. Meanwhile, adequate foreign exchange reserves and a flexible exchange rate absorb the volatility. Q3. An interview board asks: should India support a global pause on advanced AI development, as some protesters demand? Approach: A pause is hard to verify and would mainly freeze the lead of those already at the frontier, while countries like India still need AI for health, agriculture and governance. At the same time, concerns about serious risks are not baseless and deserve scientific study, which is why the UN’s International Scientific Panel on AI



matters. India's better course is to build its own capacity to test models, participate in international scientific assessment, and support rules proportionate to evidence. Governance should follow knowledge, and India should help produce that knowledge.

8. Society

Both stories today are about who the State and public figures owe care to, and in what form. Tamil Nadu has decided that a hungry child at 9 a.m. is a public problem, not a private misfortune, and it has kept that decision through a change of government. The President has told film stars that fame comes with a duty to the children who copy them, and told the film industry that its duty begins with the workers on its own sets. In both cases, the test is not the announcement but whether the care is actually delivered.

8.1 Tamil Nadu Extends Free School Breakfast to Classes 6-8, Taking Coverage to 34.64 Lakh Children

THE NEWS Chennai. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Tuesday, September 22, extended the State's free breakfast programme to students of Classes 6 to 8 in government and government-aided schools, The Indian Express reports. He launched the expanded Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Breakfast Scheme at Chennai Middle School in Gandhigramam, Thiruvananthapuram, where he sat and ate with students; ministers then inaugurated the scheme in their own regions. "Perunthalaivar", meaning "great leader", is the title by which K. Kamaraj, the former Chief Minister who spread free school meals in the old Madras State, is remembered. The expansion adds about 15.30 lakh children and 7,537 schools, with an additional ₹217.63 crore this financial year. With it, about 34.64 lakh students in Classes 1 to 8 across 44,984 government and government-aided schools will receive breakfast, at a total allocation of ₹724 crore. The menu has staples such as upma, khichdi and pongal with dal and sambar, and millet-based dishes are served twice a week. The State government described the scheme as one that brings together "physical health, nutrition, school attendance, and learning", and said it would "serve as a great support for the educational journey of students and for social progress". The programme has grown since 2022, when the then DMK government under Chief Minister M.K. Stalin introduced the CM's Breakfast Scheme for children in Classes 1 to 5; it now carries Kamaraj's name and has been expanded by a different government. Its roots go back to 1922, when P. Theagaraya Chetty, then president of the Corporation of Chennai (then Madras) and a Justice Party leader, introduced meals for underprivileged children in selected city schools. Breakfast fills a gap in the national system. PM POSHAN, the Centre-State scheme that succeeded the midday meal scheme, provides one hot cooked meal during school hours, usually lunch, so a child from a poor home may sit through the whole morning on an empty stomach. The syllabus link is GS2 on welfare schemes for vulnerable sections and on issues relating to health and education, and GS1 on poverty and social empowerment.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Justice Party leader P. Theagaraya Chetty starts meals for poor children in Madras Corporation schools in 1922 → Kamaraj in the 1950s and M.G. Ramachandran's noon meal scheme of 1982 make school feeding a Tamil Nadu tradition → a Supreme Court order of 2001 and the National Food Security Act, 2013 make a cooked midday meal a legal entitlement across India → evidence that children arrive at school hungry leads Tamil Nadu to add breakfast for Classes 1-5 in 2022 → a new government keeps the scheme, names it after Kamaraj and extends it to Classes 6-8 in September 2026

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The National Food Security Act makes the midday meal a legal right, but says nothing about breakfast** — Section 5(1)(b) of the National Food Security Act, 2013 entitles every child up to Class VIII, or in the age group of 6 to 14 years, to one free midday meal every day, except on school holidays, in schools run by local bodies, the government and government-aided schools. Schedule II of the Act sets the nutritional norms: 450 kilocalories and 12 grams of protein for primary classes, and 700 kilocalories and 20 grams of protein for upper primary classes. The Mid-Day Meal Rules, 2015, framed under the Act, require a food security allowance to be paid if the meal is not served. Because the entitlement is for one meal, a breakfast is always an addition by the State, not an obligation under central law.
- 2. PM POSHAN is the national scheme that delivers this right** — The Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) scheme was approved in September 2021 as the successor to the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, which began in 1995 as the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education. It covers children in Balvatika (pre-primary) and Classes 1 to 8 in government and government-aided schools. It is a

	centrally sponsored scheme, with costs usually shared 60:40 between the Centre and the States, and 90:10 for the north-eastern and Himalayan States. The Ministry of Education is the nodal ministry, and States can add items, such as eggs, milk or breakfast, from their own budgets. 3. The Constitution and the Supreme Court tied nutrition to schooling — Article 47, a Directive Principle, says that the State shall regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and improving public health as among its primary duties. Article 21A, inserted by the 86th Amendment in 2002, makes free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 a fundamental right, which the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 put into effect. In the case of PUCL v. Union of India, the Supreme Court on November 28, 2001 directed States to provide cooked midday meals in government and government-assisted primary schools. That order converted a scheme into an enforceable duty years before the 2013 Act. 4. The National Education Policy 2020 has already recommended a breakfast — The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 notes that children cannot learn when they are hungry or unwell. It says that the morning hours after a nutritious breakfast can be especially productive for cognitively demanding subjects, and recommends a simple but energising breakfast in addition to the midday meal. Where hot meals are not possible, it suggests simple nutritious food such as groundnuts or chana with jaggery, or local fruits. Tamil Nadu's scheme is therefore an example of a State carrying out a national policy recommendation that the central scheme has not yet funded.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS2 asks about welfare schemes and the health-education link — The syllabus names “welfare schemes for vulnerable sections” and “issues relating to development and management of social sector services relating to health and education”. Mains questions have repeatedly asked how nutrition programmes affect enrolment, attendance and learning, and how schemes can be made more effective. A State scheme that goes beyond the central one is a strong example for such answers. 2. Prelims tests entitlements, norms and nodal ministries — Prelims questions on the National Food Security Act have tested who is entitled to what, and questions on schemes regularly ask about coverage and the nodal ministry. The calorie and protein norms of Schedule II, the classes covered by PM POSHAN and the year of the Supreme Court's order are the kind of details that are asked. 3. Malnutrition data are a standing GS1 and GS2 theme — The National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) found 35.5% of children under five stunted and 67.1% of children aged 6-59 months anaemic. Any answer on hunger, human capital or the demographic dividend needs these figures, and school feeding is one of the few interventions that reaches children every working day.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Under Section 5(1)(b) of the National Food Security Act, 2013, every child up to Class VIII or aged 6 to 14 years is entitled to one free midday meal every day, except on school holidays. ● Schedule II of the National Food Security Act, 2013 prescribes 450 kilocalories and 12 grams of protein for primary classes and 700 kilocalories and 20 grams of protein for upper primary classes. ● PM POSHAN, which replaced the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in 2021, covers children in Balvatika (pre-primary) and Classes 1 to 8 in government and government-aided schools; the Ministry of Education is its nodal ministry. ● In PUCL v. Union of India, the Supreme Court in November 2001 directed all States to provide cooked midday meals in government and government-assisted

ANALYSIS

primary schools.

- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to regard raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health as among its primary duties.
- The National Education Policy 2020 recommends a simple, energising breakfast for school children in addition to the midday meal.
- In 1922, P. Theagaraya Chetty, a Justice Party leader and president of the Madras Corporation, introduced meals for poor children in selected city schools.

- 1. Breakfast reaches the hunger that lunch comes too late to fix —** A midday meal arrives after half the school day is over. Children from homes where parents leave early for daily-wage work often come to school without eating, and a hungry child in the first period is not learning, whatever the teacher does. The NEP itself says the morning hours are the most productive for difficult subjects, so breakfast is aimed at the hours that matter most. The honest caveat is that the State has published claims about attendance and learning, not an independent evaluation. Tamil Nadu should commission one now, before the expanded scheme becomes too big to question.
- 2. Adding Classes 6-8 targets the age when both anaemia and drop-out risk rise —** Classes 6 to 8 cover children of roughly 11 to 14, the start of adolescence, when growth speeds up and girls' need for iron rises. It is also the stage at which the move from primary to upper primary school causes many children to drop out, especially girls and first-generation learners. A daily meal acts as a small, steady reason to come to school. But adolescents need iron and protein more than calories, and a menu of upma, khichdi and pongal is carbohydrate-heavy. The scheme should be linked to the Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation programme and to anaemia testing under Anaemia Mukh Bharat, so that it treats the problem it claims to address.
- 3. The arithmetic makes breakfast one of the cheapest interventions in the budget —** ₹724 crore for about 34.64 lakh children works out to roughly ₹2,090 per child per year. Assuming about 220 school days, that is under ₹10 a meal; this is our own calculation, not a government figure. For that price the State gets a daily point of contact with every child in its public schools, which can also be used for health check-ups and attendance tracking. The counter-view is that every rupee in welfare competes with capital spending and teacher recruitment in a State that borrows heavily. The answer is that nutrition is itself investment in human capital, provided its results are measured.
- 4. Continuity across governments is the real lesson from Tamil Nadu —** The scheme was launched by a DMK government in 2022 and has now been expanded by a new Chief Minister, who has renamed it after Kamaraj. Renaming is political branding, but the policy itself has survived, which is unusual in a country where new governments often wind down their predecessors' schemes. The line from the Justice Party in 1922, to Kamaraj, to M.G. Ramachandran's noon meal and now to breakfast shows that in Tamil Nadu feeding schoolchildren has become a settled public commitment rather than one party's promise. The risk is competitive welfarism, where each government adds a scheme but none audits the old ones.
- 5. A shared school meal is also a lesson in social equality —** When children of all castes and communities eat the same food, cooked in the same kitchen and served in the same row, the school teaches something no textbook can. School feeding in India has historically challenged practices of caste exclusion, and objections to cooks from Dalit communities reported from different States show that the struggle is not over. A breakfast scheme doubles the number of such shared meals. Administrators should therefore treat equal seating, the hiring of cooks from all communities and swift action on any discrimination as part of the scheme, not as a separate matter.

POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	“Morning hunger is an invisible barrier to learning.” In the light of Tamil Nadu’s extension of its school breakfast scheme to Classes 6 to 8, examine the case for adding a breakfast to PM POSHAN across India. What design safeguards would make such a scheme effective? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the news: on September 22, 2026 Tamil Nadu extended the Perunthalaivar Kamarajar Breakfast Scheme to Classes 6-8, covering about 34.64 lakh children in 44,984 government and aided schools at ₹724 crore. Note that the NFSA and PM POSHAN guarantee only one midday meal. 2. Body — the case for breakfast — Use the NEP 2020 recommendation on breakfast, NFHS-5 figures on stunting (35.5%) and anaemia (67.1% among children aged 6-59 months), the productivity of morning hours for learning, and the link between daily meals and attendance, especially at the upper primary stage where drop-outs begin. Mention Article 47 and the Supreme Court’s 2001 order in PUCL. 3. Body — the concerns — Discuss cost and fiscal space, the burden on schools and cooks, food safety risks, the lack of independent evaluation, and the danger that feeding becomes a substitute for fixing teaching quality. Mention federal cost-sharing: a national breakfast would need new money under the 60:40 formula. 4. Body — design safeguards — Suggest a nutrition-rich menu with protein and iron, linkage to anaemia screening and iron supplements, social audits by parents and school management committees, kitchen hygiene standards and testing, local procurement including millets, and outcome tracking of attendance and learning rather than only meals served. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a breakfast is a low-cost, high-return investment in human capital, and that Tamil Nadu’s continuity across governments shows it can become a settled public commitment if it is measured and improved.
ADMINISTRATOR’S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are a District Collector implementing the expanded breakfast scheme. How would you make sure it works in the first month? Approach: I would first check that all newly added upper primary schools have kitchens, utensils, trained cooks and a clean water supply, and fill gaps before the launch rather than after complaints. I would appoint block-level officers to make surprise visits at breakfast time and record attendance before and after the scheme. Parents and school management committees would be asked to taste the food and report problems on a helpline. A weekly review of complaints, food quality and attendance would tell me where to act. Q2. A food-poisoning incident occurs at one school, and the media demands the scheme be suspended in the block. What do you do? Approach: I would ensure immediate medical care for the children and inform the parents personally. I would order food samples to be tested, suspend the kitchen or supplier concerned pending inquiry, and fix responsibility if negligence is found. Suspending the scheme across the block would punish thousands of children for one failure, so I would instead order hygiene inspections in every kitchen in the block within a week. I would share the findings publicly to restore trust. Q3. An interview board asks: is a free school breakfast a welfare necessity or a freebie? Approach: A freebie is usually a transfer with no clear public purpose, while a school breakfast serves defined goals: nutrition, attendance and learning. It is backed by the NEP 2020 recommendation and by the constitutional duty under Article 47. Its value, however, must be shown with data, not assumed. So I would call it a legitimate investment in human capital, provided it is evaluated and its menu actually addresses anaemia and stunting.

8.2 President Murmu Asks Film Stars Not to Endorse Harmful Products, Seeks Social Security for Film Workers

THE NEWS Ekta Nagar (Kevadia), Narmada district, Gujarat. President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday, September 22, urged popular film artistes not to endorse products harmful to people's health, while presenting the 72nd National Film Awards for 2024 near the Statue of Unity. "When successful artistes speak about the benefits of a disciplined lifestyle, millions of children and young people emulate them. I urge popular artistes not to endorse products that are harmful to people's health. A true star is the one who spreads light, not darkness," she said, according to PTI in The Hindu. To endorse means to appear in an advertisement and lend one's name and face to a product. The reports do not say which products she had in mind. The President also asked the film industry to ensure respect and social security for workers, small-scale artistes, assistants and others who contribute to the creative economy while struggling to make their mark. She recalled that at the previous ceremony she had urged the industry to make respect and sensitivity towards every crew member part of its work culture, adding, "I hope you are paying heed to these requests." She called for greater participation of women on the juries, saying many women were among the awardees and that "only when the perspective of women is included does it create a vision for entire humanity", The Indian Express reports. This was the first time the ceremony was held outside Delhi. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the idea was modelled on the G20, which was held across States and Union Territories, and invited them to propose tourist destinations for future ceremonies. Kannada actor Anant Nag received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest honour in cinema. Article 370, directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale, won Best Feature Film, and Yami Gautam won Best Actress for it. Mammooty (Bramayugam, a record-equalling fourth win that places him alongside Amitabh Bachchan) and Kartik Aaryan (Chandu Champion, as Paralympic gold medallist Murlikant Petkar) shared Best Actor. Angen (Invisible), directed by Ravi Raj Murmu of Jharkhand, became the first Santali film to win; the President, herself Santali, said it boosted "cultural diversity and social inclusivity". Bhangaar won Best Non-Feature Film and Ramnami Best Documentary. The syllabus links are GS2 on health and consumer protection, GS1 on the role of media and culture, and GS4 on social influence and persuasion.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

Film stars command huge influence over young fans → companies pay stars to endorse products, including ones harmful to health, often through surrogate advertisements → law responds with COTPA 2003, endorser liability under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the 2022 CCPA guidelines banning surrogate ads → enforcement remains weak and fees stay large → the President uses the 72nd National Film Awards on September 22, 2026 to appeal to stars' conscience, and to ask the industry to protect its own informal workers

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 makes endorsers answerable for misleading advertisements** — Section 2(28) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 defines a misleading advertisement, and Section 10 establishes the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to regulate false and misleading advertisements. Under Section 21, the CCPA can penalise a manufacturer or an endorser up to ₹10 lakh, rising to ₹50 lakh for a subsequent contravention. It can also bar an endorser from making any endorsement for up to one year, and up to three years for a repeat offence. An endorser escapes liability only if he or she exercised due diligence to verify the claims made in the advertisement.
- 2. Surrogate advertising is banned by guidelines, and tobacco advertising by statute** — Surrogate advertising means advertising a product whose own advertising is banned, such as tobacco or liquor, by using the same brand name on another product like a mouth freshener, soda or music CD. The CCPA's Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022 prohibit surrogate advertising and require that an endorsement reflect the endorser's genuine opinion based on adequate information or experience of the product. Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 prohibits direct and indirect advertising of tobacco products. The Advertising Code under the Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994 also bars advertisements for cigarettes, tobacco products and liquor on television.

	3. The Supreme Court has said celebrities share responsibility for what they endorse — In the Indian Medical Association v. Union of India case, which concerned misleading advertisements for health products, the Supreme Court in May 2024 said that advertisers, advertising agencies and endorsers are equally responsible for false and misleading advertisements. It said celebrities and social media influencers must act with responsibility because the public trusts them. It also directed that advertisers submit a self-declaration before an advertisement is published or broadcast. Separately, the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 bans advertisements that claim to cure specified diseases. 4. Film workers' social security now rests on the labour codes — The Code on Social Security, 2020 subsumed nine central laws, including the Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981, and for the first time defined gig workers and platform workers alongside unorganised workers. It allows the Centre and States to frame social security schemes for these workers. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 subsumed the Cine-Workers and Cinema Theatre Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1981. The four labour codes were brought into force in November 2025, and the e-Shram portal, launched in 2021, is the national database for registering unorganised workers.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. GS4 directly covers social influence and persuasion — The GS4 syllabus lists “social influence and persuasion” under attitude, and “role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values”. Case studies on public figures endorsing harmful products are a natural fit, and the President’s phrase “a true star spreads light, not darkness” can be quoted in an answer on role models and responsibility. 2. Consumer protection and misleading advertising are rising Prelims topics — The CCPA, the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Supreme Court’s 2024 directions on misleading advertisements are recent, well-defined and testable. Questions can ask who can be penalised, what the maximum penalties are and which body regulates advertisements. 3. The creative economy and informal work connect GS1 and GS3 — Film sets depend on daily-wage and contract workers, from spot boys to junior artistes. Questions on informalisation, gig work and social security can use the film industry as an example of a glamorous sector built on insecure labour.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	- Under Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the Central Consumer Protection Authority can impose a penalty of up to ₹10 lakh on an endorser of a false or misleading advertisement, and up to ₹50 lakh for a subsequent contravention. - The CCPA can prohibit an endorser of a misleading advertisement from making any endorsement for up to one year, extendable to three years for a subsequent contravention. - The CCPA’s 2022 guidelines on misleading advertisements prohibit surrogate advertising, that is, advertising a product whose advertising is banned by using its brand name on another product. - Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 prohibits direct and indirect advertisement of cigarettes and other tobacco products. - The Dadasaheb Phalke Award, instituted in 1969, is India’s highest award in cinema; its first recipient was Devika Rani. - Santali was added to the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution by the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003, along with Bodo, Maithili and Dogri; it is written in the Ol Chiki script.

	● The Code on Social Security, 2020 subsumed the Cine-Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981 and defines gig workers and platform workers.
ANALYSIS	1. The law already reaches endorsers; the gap is enforcement and the size of the penalty — The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the 2022 guidelines and the Supreme Court's 2024 directions already make an endorser answerable for misleading or surrogate advertising. Yet surrogate advertisements for pan masala and so-called mouth fresheners featuring film and sports stars remain common on television and at sporting events. A maximum penalty of ₹10 lakh is small next to endorsement fees that run into crores, and a one-year ban from endorsements has rarely been used against a major star. The President's appeal to conscience is therefore partly an admission that the law, as enforced, has not changed behaviour. 2. "Harmful" is a spectrum, which is why conscience must do the work at the margins — Tobacco is clearly harmful and its advertising is banned by statute. Real-money online games were banned along with their advertising by the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025. But sugary drinks, ultra-processed snacks and some "health" supplements are legal products, and the Supreme Court held in <i>Tata Press v. MTNL</i> (1995) that commercial speech is protected under Article 19(1)(a). The State cannot ban every endorsement of an unhealthy but lawful product. In that grey zone, the endorser's own judgment is the only real filter, and that is exactly where the President placed her appeal. 3. A star's influence on children is unequal, so the duty is heavier — The President pointed out that millions of children and young people copy successful artistes. Children cannot easily tell a paid advertisement from a genuine recommendation, and they trust the characters a star plays on screen. That is why the Department of Consumer Affairs' 2023 guidelines for social media influencers require clear disclosure of paid endorsements. An actor who plays a disciplined athlete on screen and then sells a harmful product off screen is trading on trust that the audience gave for another reason. The counter-view is that adults are free to choose, but the argument is weakest where the audience is children. 4. The social security appeal is the more important half of the speech — Film sets run on daily-wage labour: light workers, junior artistes, stunt performers, assistants and spot boys, many without written contracts, health cover or pensions. The President's repeat of her earlier appeal, and her line "I hope you are paying heed", suggests that little has changed since the last ceremony. The Code on Social Security, 2020 makes schemes for such workers possible, but coverage depends on registration on e-Shram and on producers and platforms actually contributing. The industry could lead by writing insurance and minimum safety terms into production contracts, instead of waiting for the State to act. 5. Taking the awards out of Delhi and honouring a Santali film show culture as federal and inclusive — Holding the first ceremony outside Delhi, and inviting States to bid with tourist destinations on the model of the G20, turns a national award into a way to spread attention across the country. The first award for a Santali film, <i>Angen</i>, recognises a language added to the Eighth Schedule only in 2003. The President's call for more women on juries follows the same logic: who judges shapes what gets recognised. The risk is that the ceremony becomes a tourism event and loses its focus on cinema, so the jury's independence and the quality of selection must remain the priority.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Celebrities command influence without matching accountability." Discuss the legal and ethical responsibilities of public figures who endorse products, with reference to the President's appeal at the 72nd National Film Awards. How can the law and self-regulation together close the gap? (15 marks, 250 words)

MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION

- 1. Introduction** — Quote the President's appeal of September 22, 2026 at Ekta Nagar: popular artistes should not endorse products harmful to health, because "a true star spreads light, not darkness", and millions of children and young people copy them.
- 2. Body — the legal framework** — Explain endorser liability under Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 (₹10 lakh and ₹50 lakh penalties, one- and three-year endorsement bans, due diligence defence), the CCPA's 2022 ban on surrogate advertising, Section 5 of COTPA, 2003 and the Supreme Court's 2024 statement that endorsers are equally responsible.
- 3. Body — the ethical dimension** — Discuss influence over children, the gap between screen image and paid endorsement, trust as a public good, and the limits of law for lawful but unhealthy products given the protection of commercial speech in *Tata Press* (1995). Use ideas of integrity, role modelling and responsibility proportional to influence.
- 4. Body — closing the gap** — Suggest stronger enforcement by the CCPA, higher penalties linked to fees, strict monitoring of surrogate ads at sporting events, disclosure rules for influencers, industry codes through self-regulatory bodies, and stars voluntarily refusing harmful endorsements. Add the President's call for social security for film workers as part of the industry's wider responsibility.
- 5. Conclusion** — Conclude that law can punish deception, but only conscience can prevent the promotion of lawful harm, so both must work together; a star's influence is a public trust, not merely a private asset.

ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH

Q1. As head of the Central Consumer Protection Authority, you receive a complaint that a leading actor is appearing in a surrogate advertisement for a pan masala brand linked to a tobacco product. What do you do?

Approach: I would examine whether the advertisement uses a brand name shared with a tobacco product and whether it amounts to surrogate advertising under the 2022 guidelines and indirect advertising under Section 5 of COTPA. I would issue notices to the manufacturer, the advertising agency and the endorser, giving each a hearing. If a violation is established, I would order the advertisement withdrawn and impose penalties, including a bar on endorsement where justified. Publishing the order would send a stronger signal than the penalty itself.

Q2. You are a State Labour Commissioner in a State with a large film industry. How would you respond to the President's appeal for social security for film workers?

Approach: I would begin with a registration drive on the e-Shram portal at studios and shooting locations, working with producers' bodies and workers' unions. I would map which workers lack health insurance and accident cover and link them to existing schemes. I would propose that State film subsidies and shooting permissions require producers to insure their crews. Regular safety inspections of sets, especially for stunt and electrical work, would complete the effort.

Q3. An interview board asks: should the government ban celebrities from endorsing junk food?

Approach: A complete ban would face constitutional difficulty, because the Supreme Court has held commercial speech to be part of free speech, and junk food is a lawful product. A better approach is to restrict advertisements aimed at children, require clear health warnings, and enforce the rules on misleading claims strictly. At the same time, I would encourage self-regulation and public pressure, which often change celebrity behaviour faster than law. The aim is to protect children without banning adults' access to information.

9. Internal Security

Both stories show India's security establishment trying to change what it measures itself by. The Air Force says it hosts Tarang Shakti not to display what it knows but to find out what it does not, and the Home Minister tells anti-narcotics chiefs to count dismantled networks and convictions rather than seizures and meetings. That is the right instinct in both cases. The test is whether the new yardsticks survive contact with institutions that have long been rewarded for the old ones.

9.1 IAF's Tarang Shakti-26 Brings Eight Air Forces, Including US F-35s, and 32 Observers to Jodhpur

THE NEWS New Delhi and Jodhpur (Rajasthan). The Indian Air Force (IAF) will host the second edition of its largest-ever multinational air exercise, Tarang Shakti-26, from September 26 to October 12 at Air Force Station, Jodhpur, and adjoining air bases, The Indian Express reports. Eight forces will fly: India, Australia, Bangladesh, France, the United States, Germany, Sri Lanka and the UAE. Thirty-two countries will attend as observers, taking the total to around 40, and around 10 Air Chiefs or equivalents are likely to attend. Foreign aircraft include the US's F-35, France's Rafale, the UAE's F-16 and Bangladesh's C-130J transport aircraft, besides other air assets; India will field the Rafale, Mirage-2000, Jaguar, Tejas, MiG-29 and Su-30 MKI. The maiden edition was held in August-September 2024 in two phases, with 11 countries participating with their air assets. Briefing the media on Tuesday, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit said Tarang Shakti had changed the IAF's earlier approach of engaging foreign air forces largely through bilateral exercises. The first edition, he said, was an important transition to planning, operating and integrating with multiple air forces simultaneously, and "Tarang Shakti-26 is the next logical step". The exercise aims to analyse tactical employment philosophy against modern air-to-air and surface-to-air weapons, to enhance interoperability, that is, the ability of different forces to operate together using compatible procedures, and to identify best practices. It will involve beyond visual range (BVR) and within visual range combat missions, air mobility operations, dynamic targeting (striking targets that emerge during a mission rather than those planned in advance), air-to-air refuelling and combat search and rescue, the recovery of aircrew downed in hostile territory. Air Marshal Dixit said recent conflicts had highlighted precision, integrated air defence, unmanned systems, information dominance, space-based capabilities and the ability to combine them in multi-domain operations. "Operation Sindoor has reinforced many of these realities for us," he said, citing intelligence-led operations, precision, integrated air and missile defence, counter-UAS (countering unmanned aerial systems, or drones) and jointness across domains. "We do not conduct Tarang Shakti to demonstrate what we already know. We conduct it to discover what we still need to learn," he said, adding that partners bring their own operational experience, and a realistic training environment lets forces test assumptions, challenge procedures and understand different ways of employing air power. The syllabus link is GS3 on security challenges and GS2 on India's bilateral and multilateral relations.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

For decades the IAF engages foreign air forces mainly through one-to-one bilateral exercises → in August-September 2024 it hosts its first multinational exercise, Tarang Shakti, with 11 countries flying → recent conflicts and Operation Sindoor underline integrated air and missile defence, counter-drone capability and jointness → Tarang Shakti-26, September 26 to October 12 at Jodhpur, brings eight air forces and 32 observer nations → India moves from being a guest at others' exercises to a convenor of air power partnerships

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. Military exercises are an instrument of defence diplomacy, and hosting is a statement of standing** — The IAF has long run bilateral air exercises such as Garuda with France, Cope India with the United States and Indradhanush with the United Kingdom, and has flown as a guest in multinational exercises such as Red Flag, hosted by the US Air Force, and Pitch Black, hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force at Darwin. The Indian Navy's MILAN has for years been India's flagship hosted multilateral naval gathering. Hosting a multinational exercise means setting the scenarios, rules and standards others train to, which is a form of influence beyond the training value. Tarang Shakti, first held in 2024, is the IAF's equivalent of that convening role.
- 2. Interoperability rests on agreements as much as on aircraft** — India has signed four foundational agreements with the United States: the General Security of Military

	Information Agreement (2002), the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (2016), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (2018) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for geospatial cooperation (2020). It also has reciprocal logistics support arrangements with partners such as France (2018) and Australia (2020). These agreements allow refuelling, repair, secure communication and information sharing between forces. Exercises then turn those paper permissions into practised procedures, which is what 'interoperability' means in practice. 3. Jointness is now a legal and institutional project in India — The post of Chief of Defence Staff was created in December 2019, and the first incumbent took office on January 1, 2020; the CDS is the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs in the Ministry of Defence. The Kargil Review Committee and the Group of Ministers that followed it had pointed to poor coordination between the services. The Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act, 2023 empowers the commanders of inter-services organisations to exercise disciplinary and administrative control over personnel of all three services under them. Integrated theatre commands, which would place Army, Navy and Air Force units in a region under one commander, have been under discussion for several years. 4. The IAF flies one of the world's most varied fleets — The Su-30MKI is a Russian design built under licence by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL); the MiG-29 is also of Russian origin; the Rafale and Mirage-2000 are French, made by Dassault Aviation; the Jaguar is an Anglo-French design; and the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft was designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency under the Ministry of Defence and is built by HAL. The F-35, made by Lockheed Martin, is a fifth-generation stealth fighter designed to be hard to detect by radar. Beyond visual range combat uses radar-guided missiles fired at targets the pilot cannot see, while within visual range combat is close-in dogfighting. A mixed fleet reduces dependence on any one supplier but multiplies the training, spares and integration burden.
WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)	1. Prelims asks which exercise goes with which country — UPSC has repeatedly set questions matching military exercises with partner countries and services, and questions on defence platforms and indigenous programmes such as Tejas. Tarang Shakti, as India's own hosted multinational air exercise, is a natural candidate, along with the distinction between bilateral exercises such as Garuda and multilateral ones such as Pitch Black and Red Flag. 2. GS2 and GS3 meet in defence diplomacy — GS2 covers bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India, and GS3 covers security challenges and the various security forces and their mandate. Mains questions have asked about India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region and about defence cooperation with the Quad partners. The participant list here, from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to the United States and France, is concrete evidence for such answers. 3. Jointness and theatre commands are a live Mains theme — Questions on the Chief of Defence Staff, theatre commands and integration of the services recur. The Vice-Chief's emphasis on jointness across domains after Operation Sindoor gives a current, attributable reference point for such answers.
PRELIMS NUGGETS	● Pitch Black is a multinational air combat exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force, and Red Flag is a multinational air combat exercise hosted by the United States Air Force. ● Garuda is a bilateral air exercise between India and France, and Cope India is a bilateral air exercise between India and the United States.

- The Tejas Light Combat Aircraft was designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and is manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
- The Chief of Defence Staff is the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs.
- The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) between India and the United States was signed in 2018, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020.
- The Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act, 2023 gives commanders of inter-services organisations disciplinary and administrative powers over personnel of all three services serving under them.
- MILAN is a multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Moving from guest to host is a claim to convening power** — For decades India trained with others largely on their terms, flying in exercises designed by the US or Australia. Hosting eight air forces and 32 observers means India now writes the scenarios, sets the pace and decides whom to invite, which is influence of a quieter kind than arms sales or treaties. It also tells smaller partners that India can be a hub for regional air power training, not merely a participant. The counter-view is cost: large exercises consume flying hours, fuel and aircraft availability, and the benefit must be shown in capability, not ceremony.
- 2. The guest list is a map of India's strategic priorities** — The eight flying forces combine two immediate neighbours, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, a Gulf partner in the UAE, two Quad partners in the United States and Australia, and two European powers, France and Germany. That spread matches India's Neighbourhood First policy, its Gulf ties and its Indo-Pacific partnerships in a single event. Bangladesh flying a C-130J at Jodhpur signals that military-to-military ties with Dhaka are being kept open whatever the state of politics. Russia, still a major source of Indian fighters, is not among the eight flying forces the paper names; whether it observes is not reported, and the list should not be over-read, but it reflects where India's training partnerships are growing.
- 3. Learning in public has limits** — Air Marshal Dixit's line that the exercise is meant to discover what the IAF still needs to learn is the right philosophy, since exercises that only rehearse known drills produce false confidence. But with around 40 countries present, including 32 observers, the most sensitive tactics and electronic procedures are unlikely to be exercised openly. The real learning will therefore come from generic but hard problems, such as coordinating many aircraft types in a crowded sky and refuelling across forces, rather than from India's specific war plans. That is still valuable, because coalition-style coordination is precisely what a mixed-origin fleet finds hardest.
- 4. An air exercise cannot by itself deliver the jointness Operation Sindoor demanded** — The Vice-Chief listed integrated air and missile defence, counter-drone capability and jointness across domains as Sindoor's lessons. Integrated air defence in India involves Army air defence units and naval assets as well as the IAF, and jointness means shared command, not merely shared airspace. Tarang Shakti trains the IAF to integrate with foreign air forces, which is useful, but integration with the Army and Navy at home depends on theatre commands and the implementation of the 2023 Inter-Services Organisations Act. The counter-view is that an air force must first master complex air operations before it can plug into joint structures, and multinational exercises raise that baseline.
- 5. A mixed fleet makes interoperability both harder and more necessary** — India flies Russian, French, Anglo-French and indigenous aircraft, and now trains alongside American F-35s and Emirati F-16s. Technical interoperability with Western forces is

	limited by differing systems and by India's own insistence on strategic autonomy, so the realistic gain is procedural interoperability: common language, shared tactics, and understanding how partners fight. That is what allows cooperation in humanitarian relief or crisis evacuation even without an alliance. Tejas flying in the same exercise as fifth-generation fighters also gives India a showcase for its indigenous platform, though it invites direct comparison as well.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"Multilateral military exercises hosted by India serve foreign policy as much as military preparedness." Discuss with reference to the Indian Air Force's Tarang Shakti exercise. What are the limits of such exercises in building operational capability? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Introduce Tarang Shakti-26: September 26 to October 12 at Air Force Station Jodhpur and adjoining bases, eight air forces flying, 32 observer nations, about 10 Air Chiefs; the second edition after the maiden 2024 exercise with 11 countries flying. 2. Body — foreign policy value — Explain the shift from bilateral to hosted multilateral exercises as convening power. Map the participant list to Neighbourhood First (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka), Gulf ties (UAE), Indo-Pacific partners (US, Australia) and Europe (France, Germany). Link to India's aspiration to be a net security provider. 3. Body — military value — Discuss interoperability, BVR and within visual range combat, dynamic targeting, air-to-air refuelling and CSAR, and the Vice-Chief's Operation Sindoor lessons: integrated air and missile defence, counter-UAS and jointness. Cite his line that the exercise is meant to discover what the IAF still needs to learn. 4. Body — limits — Note that sensitive tactics are not exercised before observers, that technical interoperability with a mixed fleet is limited, that inter-service jointness depends on theatre commands and the 2023 Act, and that exercises consume scarce flying hours. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that Tarang Shakti's value lies in making India a convenor of partnerships while exposing its forces to diverse methods, but that capability ultimately depends on jointness, indigenous production and sustained training at home.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the District Collector of Jodhpur during Tarang Shakti-26. What civil responsibilities fall on you? Approach: I would coordinate with the Air Force Station on public safety: bird-hazard control around the airfield by keeping garbage dumps and slaughter waste away from flight paths, and restrictions on drones, kites and lasers near the approach funnels. I would inform residents in advance about aircraft noise and any traffic diversions, so that rumours do not spread. Hospitals and fire services would be kept on standby for any emergency involving aircraft. Foreign delegations would need coordinated security and protocol with the police and the Ministry of External Affairs. Q2. As a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, how would you measure whether the exercise was worth its cost? Approach: I would ask the IAF for specific learning objectives set before the exercise, such as integrating with foreign tankers or coordinating mixed packages, and a report on which were met. Follow-on bilateral agreements, training exchanges or procurement interest in Indian platforms would count as diplomatic returns. I would also look at the cost in flying hours and aircraft availability against routine training foregone. Evidence of changed procedures afterwards, not the number of participating countries, is the true measure.

Q3. An interview board asks: does training with US F-35s compromise India's strategic autonomy?

Approach: Strategic autonomy means India decides its own alignments; it does not mean avoiding cooperation. India trains with the United States, France, Australia and neighbours alike, and it continues to operate Russian-origin aircraft, which is itself the practice of autonomy. The genuine concern is operational security, which forces manage by controlling what they reveal in any exercise. Choosing partners by interest, exercise by exercise, is exactly what an autonomous power does.

9.2 Shah Sets December 31, 2029 Deadline to 'Uproot' Drug Trade, Shifting Focus From Seizures to Networks

THE NEWS New Delhi. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday, September 22, set a deadline of December 31, 2029 to 'uproot' the drug trade from India, calling the fight against drugs the most difficult battle before the government. He was addressing the third National Conference of Heads of Anti-Narcotics Task Forces (ANTF) of States and Union Territories in Delhi, a two-day conference organised by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and attended by ANTF heads from 36 States and UTs, government departments and other stakeholders (The Indian Express, The Hindu). ANTFs are dedicated State police anti-drug units. "The time has now come to deliver a decisive blow against narcotics, which have become the most serious threat to the country and the world," Mr. Shah said. "By 31 December 2029, we will collectively succeed in uprooting the drug trade from India," he said. He tied the campaign to the goal of a developed India: "To build a Viksit Bharat by 2047, to save future generations, and to connect the youth with India's development, the only option before us is to make India drug-free." The Centre and States, he said, must move from "meeting to mission, reporting to result, seizure to dismantling of networks, and case to conviction". The roadmap focuses on enforcement, intelligence and operations; control of precursor and synthetic drugs (precursors are the chemicals used to manufacture drugs); demand and harm reduction; and capacity building and coordination, with more than 100 targets categorised under these pillars. Of a target of one lakh 'Nashamukt Mitras', volunteers against addiction, 46,780 have been registered by various ministries and are operational. Enforcement, he said, should move away from a seizure-centric approach to dismantling entire networks, pursuing backward and forward linkages, financial investigations, digital trails and the profits of cartels. Cartels are to be attacked at three levels: entry points, inter-State distribution systems and local sales networks within districts. Districts will be grouped into clusters according to whether they are points of manufacture or entry, transport corridors or areas of consumption. In Delhi, The Hindu reports, police detained 191 foreign nationals in a month-long operation named 'Vista 1.0', which verified the visa and immigration status of foreigners suspected of illegal stay and drug peddling, and Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu called for sustained, intelligence-led action against drug trafficking under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan. The syllabus link is GS3 on organised crime and internal security.

THE CHAIN IN ONE LINE

India sits between the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle, with long land and sea borders → trafficking grows into a cross-border, increasingly synthetic and digitally mediated trade → enforcement measured by seizures leaves cartels and their money intact → the Centre builds coordination through NCB, NCORD and State ANTFs and a demand-side campaign → at the third ANTF conference, Shah sets a December 31, 2029 deadline and a shift from seizures to networks, finance and convictions

STATIC SYLLABUS LINKAGE

- 1. The Constitution asks the state to curb drugs, and the NDPS Act is its main instrument** — Article 47, a Directive Principle, directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 consolidated earlier laws such as the Opium Acts and the Dangerous Drugs Act, 1930, and punishes production, possession, sale, transport and consumption, with penalties graded by small, intermediate and commercial quantity. The Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted in 1986 under Section 4(3) of the Act and functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 allows preventive detention of

traffickers. Since police and public order are State subjects (Entries 1 and 2 of the State List), most enforcement on the ground is by State police.

- 2. India's drug problem is shaped by geography and by treaty obligations** — India is a party to the three United Nations drug conventions: the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971, and the Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988; the NDPS Act gives effect to them. To the north-west lies the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan), a major source of opiates, and to the east the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos and Thailand), a source of heroin and methamphetamine. Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir on one side, and Manipur and Mizoram on the other, are therefore frontline States, while the coastline is used for maritime shipments. India is also one of the few countries permitted to cultivate opium legally for pharmaceutical use, which requires strict control to prevent diversion.
- 3. The NDPS Act already contains the tools for going after networks and money** — Chapter VA of the NDPS Act (Sections 68A to 68Y) provides for tracing, freezing and forfeiting property derived from drug trafficking, and NDPS offences are scheduled offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, allowing the Enforcement Directorate to act. Section 9A allows the government to regulate 'controlled substances', the precursor chemicals used to make drugs. Section 37 imposes strict bail conditions for commercial-quantity offences, and Section 50 gives a person being searched the right to be taken before a gazetted officer or magistrate, a safeguard the Supreme Court held mandatory in *State of Punjab v. Baldev Singh* (1999). Section 64A grants immunity from prosecution to an addict charged with possessing a small quantity who volunteers for treatment.
- 4. Coordination and demand reduction run on separate tracks** — The Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD) mechanism was set up in 2016 and restructured in 2019 into four tiers, from an apex committee at the Union level to district committees chaired by the District Magistrate, to bring together central and State agencies. The *Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan*, launched on August 15, 2020 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, handles awareness, treatment and rehabilitation under the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction. A national narcotics helpline, *MANAS* (1933), was launched in 2024 for citizens to report drug trafficking. Foreign nationals staying illegally are dealt with under the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, which replaced the Foreigners Act, 1946 and three other laws.

WHY UPSC LOVES THIS (TREND)

- 1. GS3 names organised crime and money laundering** — The GS3 syllabus covers linkages of organised crime with terrorism, money laundering and its prevention, and security challenges in border areas. Mains questions have asked about drug trafficking as a threat to internal security, narco-terrorism in the border States and the role of the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle. Shah's emphasis on financial investigation and cartel profits connects the drug question directly to the money-laundering part of the syllabus.
- 2. Prelims tests the legal architecture and geography** — UPSC has asked about the countries of the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle, the Directive Principles, and the agencies responsible for drug control. Questions on the NDPS Act's provisions, the nodal ministries for enforcement and demand reduction, and international conventions are likely, and a student should know which ministry runs which part.
- 3. Essay, GS1 and GS4 treat addiction as a social question** — Substance abuse among youth features in GS1 social issues and in essays on youth and development. Ethics case studies often place the candidate as a District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police facing drug abuse in a district, where enforcement, compassion for users and community mobilisation must be balanced.

PRELIMS NUGGETS

- Article 47 of the Constitution directs the State to endeavour to prohibit the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health.
- The Narcotics Control Bureau was constituted in 1986 under Section 4(3) of the NDPS Act, 1985 and functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The Golden Crescent comprises Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan; the Golden Triangle comprises Myanmar, Laos and Thailand.
- Chapter VA of the NDPS Act, 1985 provides for the forfeiture of property derived from illicit drug trafficking, and NDPS offences are scheduled offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
- Section 64A of the NDPS Act grants immunity from prosecution to an addict charged with possessing a small quantity of drugs who volunteers for de-addiction treatment.
- The Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan is implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- India is a party to the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971, and the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Counting seizures rewards activity, not results, so the shift is overdue —** A rising seizure figure is ambiguous: it can mean better policing or simply more drugs entering the country. Agencies have long reported seizures because they are easy to count and photograph, while the kingpin, the financier and the chemical supplier stay untouched. Shah's slogans, 'seizure to dismantling' and 'case to conviction', change the yardstick to outcomes that hurt the business: convictions, forfeited assets and broken supply chains. The counter-view is that seizures still remove product from the market and generate the intelligence needed to map networks, so they should be retained as an input measure, not abandoned.
- 2. A deadline to 'uproot' the trade mobilises the system but cannot be literally met —** No country has eliminated drug trafficking, because as long as demand exists and profits are high, supply adapts to new routes, substances and platforms. A fixed date of December 31, 2029 is useful for forcing 36 State task forces and central agencies to plan against milestones, and the more than 100 targets under the roadmap can supply those milestones. The danger is that pressure to show results before a deadline pushes police towards easy arrests of users and small peddlers, which inflate numbers while leaving networks intact. Success should therefore be judged by the intermediate targets, especially convictions of organisers and value of assets forfeited, rather than by a declaration that the trade has ended.
- 3. 'Case to conviction' depends on procedure, and procedure is where cases are lost —** NDPS prosecutions often fail on procedural grounds: non-compliance with the Section 50 right of a suspect to be searched before a gazetted officer or magistrate, broken chain of custody of samples, or delays in sampling and testing. At the same time, the strict bail conditions of Section 37 mean an accused may spend years in custody before a trial ends, so weak cases impose real injustice. Improving convictions therefore requires trained investigators, forensic laboratories with fast turnaround and special courts, not only tougher enforcement. A conviction drive without these risks longer detentions and more acquittals together.
- 4. Including harm reduction is significant because the law still treats users as offenders —** The roadmap lists demand and harm reduction as a pillar, and one lakh 'Nashamukt Mitras' are to be mobilised. But the NDPS Act still punishes consumption, and the immunity under Section 64A is narrow, covering only small-quantity possession by

	addicts who volunteer for treatment. A user who fears arrest avoids hospitals, which is why many public-health experts argue for diverting small-quantity users to treatment rather than prosecution. The counter-view is that decriminalisation may signal tolerance and weaken deterrence among the young. A middle path is to prosecute trafficking hard while making treatment, not jail, the default for first-time users. 5. District clustering is smart targeting, but the fight is federal and so is the risk — Classifying districts as entry points, transit corridors or consumption areas allows each to get the right tool: border and coastal interdiction, highway and courier checks, or treatment and awareness. It resembles the targeted district approach used against Left Wing Extremism. But police is a State subject, so the Centre's deadline depends on 36 ANTFs with very different capacity, and financial and digital investigation skills are thin in most State forces. Delhi's 'Vista 1.0' shows another risk: of 191 foreigners detained for suspected drug peddling and illegal stay, the reports do not say how many drug cases resulted, and immigration sweeps can slide into profiling by nationality unless they are backed by evidence.
POSSIBLE MAINS QUESTION	"India's counter-narcotics strategy must move from seizures to networks, and from cases to convictions." Examine this shift in approach. What legal, institutional and social measures are needed to make the goal of a drug-free India by 2029 credible? (15 marks, 250 words)
MODEL APPROACH TO THE MAINS QUESTION	1. Introduction — Open with the third National Conference of ANTF heads, where the Home Minister set December 31, 2029 as the deadline to uproot the drug trade and linked a drug-free India to Viksit Bharat 2047. Note India's position between the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle. 2. Body — why the shift — Explain why seizures are a weak measure and why networks, finance and digital trails matter. Cite the three-level attack on cartels (entry points, inter-State distribution, local sales), district clustering and the roadmap pillars from enforcement to capacity building. 3. Body — legal and institutional measures — Discuss NDPS Chapter VA forfeiture and PMLA, Section 9A control of precursors, procedural compliance under Section 50 and forensic capacity, special courts, NCORD coordination and ANTF capacity. Mention the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 with the Delhi 'Vista 1.0' example. 4. Body — social measures — Cover the Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan, Nashamukt Mitras (46,780 of one lakh registered), Section 64A and treatment-first approaches for users, school and family awareness, and rehabilitation. 5. Conclusion — Conclude that a deadline is a mobilising device; credibility will come from measurable outcomes such as convictions of organisers and assets forfeited, and from treating addiction as a health problem while treating trafficking as organised crime.
ADMINISTRATOR'S BRAINSTORM — Q & APPROACH	Q1. You are the Superintendent of Police of a border district in Punjab identified as an entry-point cluster. What would you change first? Approach: I would build a small financial and digital investigation cell to follow money and phone trails from every commercial-quantity seizure back to suppliers and financiers, and use NDPS Chapter VA to freeze their property. I would coordinate with the Border Security Force, the NCB and the ANTF on intelligence sharing, especially on drone drops and courier routes. Every search would follow Section 50 and sampling rules strictly, because a lost case is a free trafficker. I would report outcomes as networks disrupted and assets frozen, not just grams seized. Q2. As District Magistrate chairing the district NCORD committee, how would you

handle the demand side?

Approach: I would map de-addiction capacity in government hospitals and private centres and fill gaps with the health department, since enforcement without treatment only fills jails. Schools, colleges and panchayats would be engaged through the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan, and Nashamukt Mitras recruited from youth groups and self-help groups. I would ask the police to route first-time users to treatment where the law allows. Families would be given a confidential helpline so that they seek help rather than hide addiction.

Q3. An interview board asks: should possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use be decriminalised?

Approach: There is a strong public-health case: criminalising users drives them away from treatment, burdens courts and jails, and the NDPS Act already recognises this in Section 64A. The counter-argument is that decriminalisation may be read as approval, especially among the young, and India's treatment infrastructure is not yet ready to absorb large numbers. A balanced position is to keep trafficking severely punishable, but make diversion to treatment the default for small-quantity users, backed by investment in de-addiction services. The change should follow evidence from pilots rather than be made in one step.

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 — Six Stanzas and One Silent Officer

SCENARIO You are the District Collector of a district with a mixed population. The Centre has amended Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, extending to Vande Mataram the same legal protection as Jana Gana Mana. The Union Home Ministry issued administrative directions in January and a circular in July. According to a petition by Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna, these require the playing and mass singing of all six stanzas of Vande Mataram before the National Anthem at public functions, and non-compliance risks up to three years' imprisonment, a fine or both. The petition says stanzas three to six are "expressly devotional, deity-invoking and non-secular". On September 22, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant heard the petition. Justice Joymalya Bagchi said it is for the elected State to decide what the national song is, "two stanzas or four", but that a conscientious objector who does not recite one or all stanzas cannot be subjected to criminal consequences. He said the 1986 ruling in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* still governs; in that case the Court held that expelling students who stood respectfully but did not sing the National Anthem violated their fundamental rights. The Solicitor General said "secularism will never be this narrow", and the Centre has two weeks to reply. The Court has not stayed the law. Your Collectorate is organising the district's Gandhi Jayanti function on October 2. Your protocol officer reminds you of the circular. A senior Deputy Collector with an excellent record writes to you that she will stand in respectful silence but will not sing stanzas three to six, which she says conflict with her faith. Two schoolteachers leading the children's choir say the same. A local organisation has announced that it will film the ceremony and file police complaints against "anyone who insults the national song". The Superintendent of Police warns of trouble either way. A reporter asks whether you will "enforce the law or bend it".

- Q1.** What values and duties are in conflict here, and what is the legal position as of today?
- Q2.** How will you conduct the October 2 function, and how will you respond to the Deputy Collector and the teachers?
- Q3.** Is a public servant's duty to implement a law the same as a duty to personally perform every act it prescribes?

MODEL APPROACH

- 1. Separate what the State may ask of a function from what it may force on a person** — The State may decide the form of a public ceremony, including which stanzas are played, and the Collector must organise the function as the circular directs. Forcing an individual to sing words against their faith is a different matter. *Bijoe Emmanuel* held that standing respectfully in silence is not disrespect, and that punishing it violates the freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a) and freedom of conscience under Article 25. The Supreme Court has just said that this law still governs, even though the challenge to the amendment is pending. The Collector should therefore carry out the ceremony in full while not compelling any individual to sing.
- 2. The Deputy Collector is objecting on conscience, not refusing to do her job** — An officer who refuses to organise a lawful function, or who disrupts it, would be breaking service discipline. The Deputy Collector is doing neither: she will attend, stand and show respect, and declines only to sing certain verses herself. That is the kind of silent, non-disruptive conscientious objection the Supreme Court described. Treating it as misconduct would expose her to injustice and the administration to legal challenge. The Collector should reply in writing that her position is noted and respected, and make sure it has no effect on her assessment or posting. Protecting a subordinate from victimisation is part of a leader's duty.
- 3. Design the ceremony so that respect and freedom can exist together** — The Collector can have the full song played by a band or recording, invite everyone to stand, and let a choir of willing singers lead the singing. No roll-call of who sang, no public singling out and no official filming of individual faces should take place. The teachers who object should not be made to lead the choir, and children should not be put in a position where their parents' faith is tested in public. Protocol staff should be briefed in advance so that no junior official improvises. Good administration often means designing the situation so that the conflict never has to be played out on stage.
- 4. Deal with threats of vigilantism firmly and impartially** — A private group has no power to police anyone's conscience, and filming people to target them can lead to intimidation or violence. The Collector and the Superintendent of Police should make clear that anyone who disrupts the ceremony or harasses individuals will face action under law, whichever side they

are on. If complaints are filed, police must examine them against the law as declared by the Supreme Court and must not arrest anyone for silent non-participation. Equal protection of the law under Article 14 means that the administration protects both the dignity of the song and the rights of objectors.

5. **Put the ambiguity to the government in writing** — The petitioners say the Home Ministry's office memorandum was never gazetted and cites no provision of law, and the Court is still examining how far penal consequences can go. A district officer should not be left to decide such questions alone. The Collector should write to the State government and, through it, the Home Ministry, asking how officers are to treat conscientious objectors until the Supreme Court decides, and should record the steps he has taken and why. This protects the principle of accountability, because decisions are traceable, and of consistency, because every district then acts alike.
6. **Answer the reporter with the Constitution, not with a side** — The Collector should say that the district will observe the prescribed ceremony with full respect for the national song, that no one will be forced to act against conscience in line with the Supreme Court's observations, and that any disruption or intimidation will be dealt with firmly. Neutrality here does not mean indifference; it means applying the same rules to everyone. The Nolan principles of objectivity, openness and leadership all point the same way: act on law and evidence, explain the decision, and show by example that respect for national symbols and respect for citizens' faith are not enemies.

Case 2 — The Award on Tuesday, the Offer on Wednesday

SCENARIO You are a popular film actor who received a National Film Award from President Droupadi Murmu at Ekta Nagar, near the Statue of Unity in Gujarat, on September 22. It was the first time the ceremony was held outside Delhi. In her speech, the President urged popular artistes not to endorse products harmful to people's health. "When successful artistes speak about the benefits of a disciplined lifestyle, millions of children and young people emulate them," she said. "A true star is the one who spreads light, not darkness." She also asked the film industry to ensure respect and social security for workers, small-scale artistes and assistants who struggle to make their mark, and recalled that she had made a similar request at the previous ceremony: "I hope you are paying heed to these requests." The next morning, your manager brings you an offer: ₹12 crore for two years as the face of a pan masala brand. The parent company sells chewing tobacco under the same brand name, but the advertisements will show only a cardamom "mouth freshener", and the company's lawyers say the campaign has been cleared. Your last film employed about 150 daily-wage workers, including light men, junior artistes and stunt performers, most without health insurance; last year a stunt performer on your film was injured and paid his own hospital bills. You have publicly promised to set up a welfare fund for your crew, and this one fee could fund it for years. A second offer, for a sugary energy drink marketed to teenagers, pays less. Your 14-year-old niece tells you that her classmates copy your hairstyle and dialogue. A public health doctor has tagged you on social media, quoting the President's words. Your role in the film that won the award was that of a disciplined athlete who overcame addiction.

- Q1. What are the ethical issues involved in accepting each of the two offers?
- Q2. Can the good you would do with the fee for your crew justify the endorsement? Why or why not?
- Q3. What would you do, and how would you explain your decision publicly?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Call the surrogate advertisement what it is** — A mouth freshener sold under the same brand name as a chewing tobacco product is a textbook surrogate advertisement: the real purpose is to keep the tobacco brand in public memory when its own advertising is banned by Section 5 of COTPA, 2003. The CCPA's 2022 guidelines prohibit surrogate advertising, and under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 an endorser can be penalised and barred from endorsements. Legal clearance by the company's lawyers is not the same as legitimacy. Areca nut, the main ingredient of pan masala, is itself classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a carcinogen. The first offer therefore fails both the legal test and the ethical one.
2. **Good ends do not clean up harmful means** — The welfare fund argument is attractive because the crew's need is real and the actor's promise was sincere. But it asks thousands of young fans to bear a health risk so that 150 workers can be insured, which uses the fans as a means to someone else's end. Kant's principle that people must never be treated merely as means, and Gandhi's warning against "commerce without morality", both reject this bargain. More practically, the crew can be protected in other ways: from part of the actor's own fees, by writing insurance into production contracts, and by registering workers for public schemes. When a good end can be reached by clean means, choosing the harmful means is hard to defend.

3. **Influence brings a duty in proportion to its reach** — The President's point was that a star's choices are copied by millions of children, as the niece's remark confirms. Children cannot easily tell a paid advertisement from a genuine recommendation, and they trust the actor because of the characters he plays. An actor who plays an athlete who beat addiction, and then sells a product linked to addiction, is spending trust that the audience gave for a different reason. The Supreme Court said in 2024 that endorsers are equally responsible for misleading advertisements. Responsibility grows with influence, and a public figure's choices are never only private.
4. **Judge the energy drink on its own facts, not as a lesser evil** — The second offer is not automatically acceptable because it is less harmful. The actor should ask what the product contains, what claims it makes, and whether it is aimed at children and teenagers. If its marketing targets teenagers with a high-sugar, high-caffeine product and claims of energy or performance, it conflicts with the same principle. The actor can decline, or accept only on conditions such as no child-targeted campaigns, truthful claims and clear labelling. Due diligence of this kind is also the legal defence the Consumer Protection Act allows an endorser, so ethics and prudence point the same way.
5. **Turn the refusal into positive action** — Declining quietly protects the actor's integrity, but acting openly can also change the industry. The actor could fund health and accident insurance for his crew from his own earnings, insist that future producers include such cover in contracts, and help workers register on the e-Shram portal. He could lend his face, free or at a reduced fee, to a public health campaign against tobacco or for fitness. This answers the President's second appeal on social security as well as the first. Virtue is not only the avoidance of harm but the active doing of good.
6. **Explain the decision without preaching** — In public, the actor should say simply that he will not endorse products that harm health because young people follow him, and that he is setting up insurance for his crew from his own resources. He should avoid attacking colleagues who take such endorsements, since moralising invites resentment and makes the message about himself. Consistency between one's public image and private choices is what integrity means, and over time it is also what gives a star lasting credibility. The short-term loss of ₹12 crore is real, but the trust of an audience is the asset on which every future role and endorsement depends.

Case 3 — The Ranger Who Chased the Dumper Alone

SCENARIO You are a senior forest officer asked by the Rajasthan government to take charge of the Pratapgarh forest division and to report within 15 days on the death of one of its officers. Late on Monday, September 21, the forest team received information that soil was being illegally mined from a forest area near the Ghatiwale Balaji temple, within the limits of the Choti Sadri police station. Forest Ranger Pratap Singh Chundawat, 40, and forest guards Suresh and Ajay reached the spot and found five or six persons digging with a JCB and a dumper. When the dumper tried to escape, Mr. Chundawat chased it on his motorcycle. According to the Deputy SP, co-accused who caught up urged the driver to "crush him", and the driver, identified as Kana Bawri, allegedly ran over the ranger and escaped. He died at the Nimbahera government hospital on Tuesday. An FIR has been lodged, the JCB and the dumper have been seized, and some persons, including the JCB's owner and driver, have been detained. The soil was a thick "gaara" mud used to make bricks, plaster walls and fill gaps in houses. The division's Deputy Conservator called him "our best officer"; he had been nominated for a State award this Independence Day and was active in rescuing panthers and pythons. Since his death, forest guards have told you they will not go on night patrols without an armed police escort, and their association is demanding firearms. Villagers say poor families dig this mud for their own kachcha houses and that small buyers depend on it. A local politician asks you to "go slow on poor people's mud" while demanding the harshest action against the killers. The ranger's widow asks you whether her husband "was sent to die". Your preliminary review finds that the division has no written protocol on pursuing offenders at night.

- Q1. Who, apart from the driver, bears responsibility for the ranger's death, and in what sense?
- Q2. How would you restore enforcement against illegal mining without putting your staff at undue risk?
- Q3. How would you treat poor households who dig soil for their own homes, as distinct from organised illegal miners?

MODEL APPROACH

1. **Justice for the ranger means pursuing the whole network, not only the driver** — The first duty is to ensure a thorough criminal investigation, working with the police so that the charges reflect both the killing and the alleged incitement by the co-accused. The investigation should trace who owns the machines, who hired them and who buys the mud, because a JCB and a dumper at midnight point to an organised business, not household need. Forest offences under the Rajasthan Forest Act, 1953 and violations under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 should be added where

they apply, along with confiscation of the vehicles. A quick and complete chargesheet is the most meaningful tribute the department can offer.

2. **The State owes a duty of care to those it sends into danger** — Mr. Chundawat acted with courage, but courage should not have to replace systems. A division that sends small teams into forests at night against men with heavy machines, without a written protocol on pursuit, communication or police back-up, has failed its staff. The honest answer to the widow is that her husband was doing his duty and that the department did not equip him well enough. She should get every entitlement quickly, including compensation, family pension and a compassionate appointment if eligible, without being made to chase files. Accepting institutional responsibility is not a slight on the dead officer; it is respect for him.
3. **Restore patrolling with safer methods before debating firearms** — The guards' fear is legitimate, and ordering them back without changes would be unfair and would not work. The officer should issue a standard operating procedure at once: night operations only in adequate teams, with vehicles and radios, prior intimation to the police station, and no solo chases, recording vehicle numbers instead for later seizure. Joint patrols with the police, check-posts on exit routes, and cameras or drones at known digging sites can do more than individual bravery. The demand for firearms can be examined with the State, but arms without training, legal backing and clear rules of engagement create new risks.
4. **Distinguish need from greed** — A family digging a few baskets of mud for its own walls is not the same as a JCB and a dumper removing soil for sale at midnight. Treating both alike would either criminalise poverty or, more likely, let the organised miners hide behind the poor. The officer should propose to the district administration that legal sites outside the forest be identified for household extraction, with simple permits. Enforcement can then focus on machine-based, commercial extraction from forest land. Proportionality and equity are not weaknesses in enforcement; they make enforcement credible and win the community's cooperation.
5. **Answer political pressure with transparency** — The politician's request contains a fair point about the poor and an unfair one if "going slow" is meant to protect the business. The officer should accept the first part openly, through the household permit proposal, and reject the second without confrontation. Instructions should be sought and given in writing, and the officer should record any pressure to relax action against organised mining. The Nolan principles of integrity and objectivity require decisions to be based on law and evidence, not on who is asking. Clarity early on usually discourages repeated pressure.
6. **Honour him in a way that changes the system** — The 15-day report should go beyond fixing blame for one night. It should recommend a statewide pursuit protocol, equipment, joint task forces with police and mining departments, a public helpline for reporting illegal mining, and involvement of village forest protection committees, who often know about digging before the department does. The department can name an award or a check-post after Mr. Chundawat, but the best memorial is that no ranger is again left to chase a dumper alone. Leadership in such moments means turning grief into lasting reform while keeping the staff's morale intact.

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
Article 80 — Rajya Sabha elections	Under Article 80(4), the representatives of each State in the Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected members of its Legislative Assembly by proportional representation through the single transferable vote. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body that is not dissolved; one-third of its members retire every second year under Article 83(1), and a member elected in a bye-election serves only the remainder of the predecessor's term. The Election Commission has announced polls to 12 seats on October 16, after which the BSP will be left with no member in Parliament.
Delimitation freeze — Articles 81 and 82	Article 81 caps the elected strength of the Lok Sabha at 550 (up to 530 from States and 20 from Union Territories), and Article 82 requires seats to be readjusted after each Census. The 42nd Amendment (1976) froze the allocation of seats among States on the basis of the 1971 Census until 2001, and the 84th Amendment (2001) extended the freeze until the first Census after 2026. The Hindu, launching a book titled <i>The Delimitation Debate</i> , notes that the Lok Sabha's strength has been raised three times but has not changed since 1976.
Article 239AA — who controls Delhi's police	Article 239AA, inserted by the 69th Amendment in 1991, lets the Delhi Legislative Assembly make laws on State List and Concurrent List subjects except public order (Entry 1), police (Entry 2) and land (Entry 18) of the State List. Delhi Police therefore reports to the Union Home Ministry through the Lieutenant-Governor, not to the elected government. Lt-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu has directed Delhi Police to set up a women-only "Pink Force", modelled on Goa Police, to patrol schools, colleges and metro stations after the Kalkaji gang-rape.
Articles 227 and 235 — control over trial courts	Article 235 vests control over district courts and courts subordinate to them, including postings, promotions and leave of judicial officers, in the High Court, and Article 227 gives every High Court superintendence over all courts and tribunals in its territory. The Supreme Court does not have administrative control over trial judges. Hearing complaints from the families of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri victims against the trial judge, the Supreme Court placed the matter before the Allahabad High Court's Chief Justice, saying superintendence "is vested with the HC concerned".
Solicitor General — a statutory, not constitutional, office	Article 76 creates the Union's only constitutional law officer, the Attorney General for India (Article 165 provides the States' Advocates General), who has the right of audience in all courts in India and, under Article 88, the right to speak in Parliament without a vote. The Solicitor General and Additional Solicitors General are appointed by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet under the Law Officers (Conditions of Service) Rules, 1987. In an unusual appearance, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued in the Supreme Court for the Karnataka government's Greater Bengaluru Authority on its Premium Floor Area Ratio scheme; a Central law officer may appear for a party as long as the case is not against the Union.
Lalita Kumari and the preliminary inquiry	In <i>Lalita Kumari v. State of U.P.</i> (2013), a Constitution Bench held that registering an FIR is mandatory when information discloses a cognisable offence, but allowed a preliminary inquiry in categories such as matrimonial disputes, commercial offences, medical negligence and corruption cases. Section 173(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 now allows a preliminary enquiry, to be completed within 14 days, for offences punishable with three to seven years, with the permission of an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent. Keralam cited <i>Lalita Kumari</i> , along with the ED's information-sharing power under Section 66(2) of the PMLA, while ordering a police inquiry into the CMRL-Exalogic case involving former Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.
PMLA — the scheduled offence	Under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, the offence of money laundering (Section 3) depends on proceeds of crime generated from a "scheduled" (predicate) offence listed in the

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	Act's Schedule, and under Section 44 a Special Court takes cognisance on a complaint by an authority authorised under the Act. In <i>Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India</i> (2022), the Supreme Court held that the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) is an internal document, not the equivalent of an FIR. Sonia and Rahul Gandhi have told the Delhi High Court that the ED's National Herald case, which began with a private complaint, cannot proceed without a predicate offence.
Section 98, BNSS — forfeiting publications	Section 98 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (Section 95 of the old CrPC) allows a State government, by notification stating its grounds, to declare forfeited any newspaper, book or document whose content appears to be punishable under specified provisions of criminal law; an affected person may apply to the High Court to set the order aside. A book is "banned" in law only through such a formal order. The Jammu and Kashmir government told its Assembly that 4,812 books were withdrawn from college libraries after screening, of which 518 were banned books and 4,249 were not.
SEBI settlement under Section 15JB	Section 15JB of the SEBI Act, 1992, inserted by the Securities Laws (Amendment) Act, 2014, allows a person facing adjudication proceedings to settle them by paying an amount, without admitting or denying the findings; the procedure is laid down in the SEBI (Settlement Proceedings) Regulations, 2018. Section 23JA of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 is the parallel provision. SEBI settled proceedings over related-party and listing-rule disclosures against five Adani group companies on terms recommended by its High Powered Advisory Committee.
Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR)	The VRRR is an auction under the RBI's Liquidity Adjustment Facility in which banks park surplus funds with the RBI at market-determined rates, draining liquidity from the system; it is the opposite of a Variable Rate Repo, which injects liquidity. The Standing Deposit Facility, introduced in April 2022 after a 2018 amendment to the RBI Act, lets the RBI absorb liquidity without giving collateral and forms the floor of the policy rate corridor. The RBI absorbed ₹71,971 crore through an overnight VRRR on Tuesday to bring the call money rate in line with the repo rate amid a large surplus.
Blue bonds	A blue bond is a debt instrument whose proceeds finance ocean and water-related projects such as sustainable fisheries, clean water, marine conservation and clean shipping; Seychelles issued the world's first sovereign blue bond in 2018. In India, SEBI's framework for green debt securities was widened in 2023 to include blue bonds. Sagarmala Finance Corporation, India's first maritime lender, named after the Sagarmala port-led development programme approved in 2015, plans to raise funds through India's first blue bond on September 28.
UDAN — Regional Connectivity Scheme	UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik), the Regional Connectivity Scheme launched under the National Civil Aviation Policy, 2016, caps fares on a share of seats and gives airlines viability gap funding to fly to unserved and under-served airports; the first UDAN flight ran between Shimla and Delhi in April 2017. Viability gap funding is shared between the Centre and the States, and the Airports Authority of India is the implementing agency. The Civil Aviation Ministry has signed MoUs with 21 States and UTs to propose new RCS airports, which the minister says will help create 100 more airports in 10 years; the Cabinet approved 'Modified UDAN' in March for another 10 years with ₹28,840 crore.
Airport concessions and airline cross-holding	Delhi and Mumbai airports are run under public-private partnership agreements, the Operation, Management and Development Agreements (OMDA), with the Airports Authority of India holding 26% in each operating company. The OMDA bars scheduled airlines and their group entities from holding more than 10% of the airport operator, which in effect also stops the operator from promoting an airline. Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu says the government will weigh the pros and cons of an Adani group request for a waiver; the Competition Act, 2002 separately prohibits anti-competitive vertical agreements under Section 3 and abuse of dominance, including denial of market access, under Section 4.
Anusandhan National Research Foundation	The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) was set up under the ANRF Act, 2023 to fund and coordinate research in universities and laboratories; the Prime Minister is the ex-officio

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	president of its governing board. The Act repealed the Science and Engineering Research Board Act, 2008 and folded the SERB into the ANRF, which aims to draw a large share of its funding from non-government sources. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told a management convention that India's gross expenditure on R&D is 0.83% of GDP and that the private sector contributes only 36% of it, against over 70% in leading advanced economies.
Article 243Q — types of municipalities	Article 243Q, added by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, provides for three kinds of urban local bodies: a Nagar Panchayat for an area moving from rural to urban, a Municipal Council for a smaller urban area and a Municipal Corporation for a larger urban area. The Twelfth Schedule lists 18 functions, including urban planning, water supply and slum improvement, that States may devolve to them. Oxford Economics' 2026 Global Cities Index places 55 Indian cities among the world's 100 fastest-growing, yet Delhi, the top-ranked Indian city overall, stands at 268th.
Disaster Management Act, 2005 — the response forces	The Disaster Management Act, 2005 set up the National Disaster Management Authority, chaired by the Prime Minister, and State authorities chaired by Chief Ministers. Section 44 constitutes the National Disaster Response Force, a specialist force, while States raise their own State Disaster Response Forces; relief is financed through the State Disaster Response Fund, to which the Centre contributes most of the money on Finance Commission recommendations. Bihar's Disaster Management Department says floods have affected about 49.72 lakh people in 15 districts, with 27 SDRF and eight NDRF teams deployed.
Manjusha art	Manjusha is a folk painting tradition of the Anga region around Bhagalpur in Bihar, named after the temple-shaped boxes (manjusha) on which it was traditionally painted. It illustrates the legend of Bihula and Bishahari, with snakes as a central motif, and is drawn in bold outlines with a limited palette dominated by pink, green and yellow. At flood relief camps in Bhagalpur, local artists are teaching displaced children Manjusha as a form of art therapy.
Agrément	Under Article 4 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961, a sending State must obtain the receiving State's agrément, its formal consent, before accrediting a person as head of its diplomatic mission, and the receiving State need not give reasons for refusing it. Heads of mission between Commonwealth countries are called High Commissioners rather than Ambassadors. India has given its agrément for Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Asad Alam Siam to become Dhaka's next High Commissioner in New Delhi, ahead of a possible India visit by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.
Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act	Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act was enacted in 1979 as a temporary law and made permanent in 1982; it allows extended detention and has long been criticised by human rights bodies. A special High Court Trial-at-Bar, a bench of three judges appointed in 2021, has convicted 14 of the 24 accused over the April 2019 Easter Sunday bombings of churches and hotels, which killed 279 people. The Attorney General had filed 23,270 charges, including under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.
Bab el-Mandeb and Perim (Mayun) Island	The Bab el-Mandeb strait lies between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, and links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. Perim Island, called Mayun in Arabic, belongs to Yemen and sits in the strait, dividing it into two channels; the Yemeni port of Mokha gave its name to mocha coffee. The Indian Express, quoting MP-IDSA's Prasanta Kumar Pradhan, reports that the Houthis' capture of Mayun Island and the port of Mokha has strengthened their hold over this shipping route.
ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution	The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, signed in 2002 and in force from 2003, is a legally binding regional agreement to prevent and monitor haze from land and forest fires; Indonesia, the main source of the haze, was the last member to ratify it, in 2014. Much of the smoke comes from burning drained peatlands, which smoulder for weeks and release large amounts of carbon. Indonesia's Health Ministry says more than 170,000 respiratory cases have been recorded in haze-affected regions as fires burn in Borneo, Sumatra and Papua.
Greater adjutant (hargila)	The greater adjutant (<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>), called hargila in Assamese, is a large scavenging stork

TOPIC	EXAM-PATTERN FACTS
	whose main breeding colonies are in Assam and in Bihar's Bhagalpur area, with a smaller population in Cambodia. Conservationist Purnima Devi Barman protected its nesting trees in Assam's Kamrup district by organising village women into the "Hargila Army", and received the UN Environment Programme's Champions of the Earth award in 2022. She has now been named businessline's Changemaker of the Year for this work.
Venice Biennale and India's pavilion	The Venice Biennale, which began in 1895, is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious contemporary art exhibitions, and countries present work in national pavilions, 30 of which own permanent buildings in the city's Giardini park. India has had a national pavilion only three times: in 2011, 2019 and 2026. This year's pavilion, 'Geographies of Distance: Returning Home', curated by Amin Jaffer with five craft-rooted artworks on the idea of home, marks India's return after seven years.
Right to health — Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity (1996)	In Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v. State of West Bengal (1996), the Supreme Court held that the failure of government hospitals to provide timely emergency treatment violates the right to life under Article 21, and that financial constraints do not excuse the State from this duty. The Indian Public Health Standards set staffing and equipment norms for public health facilities. The Delhi High Court, in a suo motu PIL begun in 2017, has said contractual hiring cannot solve staff shortages and that no top post, such as medical superintendent, should be vacant in Delhi's 38 government hospitals.

Source note: All items are drawn from *The Indian Express* & *The Hindu* (Delhi Edition) — 23 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

Obedience can be commanded; loyalty has to be earned.

Themes: Ethics · Conscience and the State · Institutions

In 1985, three children in a Kerala school, Bijoe, Binu Mol and Bindu Emmanuel, stood up every morning when the National Anthem was sung. They stood in silence, because their faith as Jehovah's Witnesses did not allow them to sing it. For this they were expelled. In August 1986 the Supreme Court ordered them readmitted. Standing respectfully, it held, was no insult to the anthem, and no law compelled anyone to sing. Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy ended the judgment with a line that Indian law students still learn: "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our Constitution practises tolerance; let us not dilute it." The children were not disloyal. They gave the state everything it could fairly ask for, their presence and their respect, and refused only the one thing it could not take: words their conscience did not believe.

The case shows a distinction that every government has to learn. Obedience is conduct produced by the threat of a penalty. It lasts as long as someone is watching. Loyalty is allegiance given freely, and it lasts when nobody is watching. A state needs both. But force can produce only the first. Loyalty is a return on fairness. It grows when power explains itself, respects the limits of conscience and treats the citizen as a partner rather than a suspect. When a state tries to command loyalty directly, it usually ends up with less of both.

History makes the point well. On 23 September 1918, cavalry from Jodhpur and Mysore charged up the slopes of Mount Carmel and took Haifa for the British Empire. More than a million Indians served overseas in that war. Gandhi himself toured Kheda in 1918 urging villagers to enlist. Few empires have commanded such obedience from a subject people. Within months came the Rowlatt Act, which allowed detention without trial, and then the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919. Tagore gave up his knighthood, and by 1920 the Non-Cooperation Movement had begun. An empire that could send men into a cavalry charge could not keep the loyalty of the people those men came from. Coercion had used it up.

Literature has always understood this. Sophocles' Antigone buries her brother against King Creon's decree, appealing to unwritten laws older than any king. In his 1849 essay on civil disobedience, Henry David Thoreau asked, "Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator?" When the Inquisition made Galileo recant in 1633, it got a signature. The story that he muttered "and yet it moves" is almost certainly a legend, but it has lasted because everyone understands that a confession taken under threat proves nothing except the power of the person who took it. Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four takes the idea to its end. The Party is not satisfied with Winston's obedience; it wants his love. To get it, it has to destroy him, and the novel ends with the chilling line: "He loved Big Brother." Compelled love needs the lover to be broken first.

Constitutional democracies have learnt the same lesson in their courts. In 1940 the United States Supreme Court allowed schools to make children salute the flag. Three years later, after a wave of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses, it reversed itself in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*. Justice Robert Jackson warned that "compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard." India now faces a version of the same question. Vande Mataram carried the freedom movement. In 1937 the Congress Working Committee chose its first two stanzas for national gatherings, and on 24 January 1950 Rajendra Prasad told the Constituent Assembly that it would be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana. The song won that place because people sang it freely, often under lathi blows. A law that

threatens prison for those who, on grounds of faith, will not sing all six stanzas risks cheapening the very devotion it wants to protect. The Supreme Court Bench hearing the challenge has drawn the right line, at least orally: the state may choose the symbol, but it cannot punish a conscientious objector.

The same principle governs institutions from the inside. Since 1993 the Election Commission has been a multi-member body, and the law asks it to act unanimously where possible and by majority otherwise. The Supreme Court upheld this collegial design in *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India* in 1995. Reports that two Election Commissioners recorded fourteen written objections in ten months, to orders issued in the Commission's name without their knowledge, matter for this reason. A dissenting note is not disloyalty. It is the most loyal thing a member can do for an institution whose authority depends on voters believing that it deliberates. The Supreme Court's ruling that the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters Act was "still-born" rests on the same ground. A crime, it held, must be created by the legislature, not by a police gang chart. Max Weber argued that modern authority is legitimate when people believe in the legality of rules made through a known procedure. Take away the procedure, and all that is left is command.

The counter-position deserves a fair hearing. Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan* in 1651 that without a power able to compel, human life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." All law is coercive at root. Taxes are not voluntary, and no state waits for a burglar's consent. Compulsion can also come before loyalty and produce it. Article 17 abolished untouchability by command, not by persuasion, and Aristotle argued that we become just by doing just acts, so habits formed under law can become convictions. The Constitution itself, in Article 51A(a), asks citizens to respect the flag and the anthem. In the 1948 debate on the uniform civil code, K.M. Munshi argued that a state which waits for every community to agree to reform may wait forever while women pay the price.

These objections are serious, but they prove a narrower point than they claim. What compulsion can legitimately secure is conduct that protects other people: not stealing, not discriminating, not insulting what others hold dear. Such compulsion turns into loyalty only when the rule is fair, made by the right body and openly explained. The law against untouchability earned allegiance because it gave dignity to people who had been denied it. A compelled chorus gives nothing to anyone. Even on the civil code, Ambedkar told the Assembly that a future Parliament might make adherence "purely voluntary", and the Special Marriage Act of 1954 already offers a secular code to anyone who chooses it. Reform that invites people in lasts longer than reform that forces them.

For an administrator, the lesson is practical. Every order draws on a reserve of public trust. Command draws that reserve down; fairness, explanation and respect for conscience fill it up again. The Emmanuel children understood this better than the officials who expelled them. Their silent standing, morning after morning, showed more respect than a chorus sung out of fear. A republic that is sure of itself asks for obedience to its laws, and then waits, patiently and without threats, to be loved.

Built from today's cards: Supreme Court Says State May Fix Vande Mataram's Stanzas but Cannot Prosecute Conscientious Objectors · Two Election Commissioners Record 14 Objections in 10 Months, Call Form 6 Change 'Unauthorised and Illegal' · Supreme Court Calls U.P. Gangsters Act 'Still-Born', Reaffirming That Only the Legislature Can Create a Crime · Constituent Assembly's 1948 UCC Debate Revisited as Mizoram BJP MLA Breaks With Anti-UCC Resolution

ESSAY 2 · Essay · Section B · 6 min read

The hand that feeds is often the last to be fed.

Themes: Agriculture · Inequality · Social justice

Premchand's last completed novel, *Godaan*, published in 1936, is the story of Hori, a small peasant who spends his whole life wanting one modest thing: a cow tied at his door. He ploughs, borrows, repays, is cheated, and borrows again, and in the end collapses while working as a labourer in the summer heat. As he lies dying, the village priest asks for the ritual gift of a cow. His wife Dhaniya puts the few coins she earned that day into the priest's hand and says that this is her husband's *godaan*. Premchand did not present this as bad luck. He presented it as the ordinary shape of a peasant's life.

The prompt describes a pattern, not an accident. The people who produce what is most necessary often sell it with the least bargaining power, hold the least power and carry the most risk. The pattern works through three mechanisms: the price chain, which moves value away from the producer; the record, which counts the owner rather than the worker; and control over shared resources, which rewards whoever can dig deepest. This essay argues that the pattern is real but not inevitable. The remedy is not charity but institutions that let the feeder bargain, be counted and be protected.

Famine shows the pattern at its starkest. Amartya Sen opened *Poverty and Famines* (1981) with a sentence that changed the study of hunger: "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat." In the Bengal famine of 1943, he showed, the worst victims were rural labourers, fishermen and artisans, the very people who worked the food economy. Wartime demand from the city priced grain out of their reach. In Ireland in the 1840s, food continued to leave the country while its cultivators starved. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), John Steinbeck describes fruit being destroyed to hold up prices while the children of the migrant pickers go hungry.

The same logic runs, more quietly, through ordinary markets today. A new estimate by researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute finds that of each rupee an Indian household spends on food cooked at home, about 57.8 paise reaches the farm; when the family eats out, the farm gets just 8.4 paise. Under the cooperative model that Verghese Kurien built at Anand, Amul's dairy farmers have historically received more than 60 per cent of the retail price, because they own the plant, the brand and the distribution. Their larger share came from ownership, not from anyone's goodwill.

Recognition matters as much as price. Women are a large and growing part of India's farm workforce, yet more than 41 per cent of female agricultural workers were unpaid in 2025, only about 14 per cent of operational holdings are with women, and women are only 23 per cent of PM-KISAN beneficiaries. The state pays the name on the land record, and that name is mostly a man's. In *A Field of One's Own* (1994), the economist Bina Agarwal argued that independent land rights, not employment alone, decide a woman's security and bargaining power at home. The Food and Agriculture Organization's State of Food and Agriculture report for 2010-11 estimated that equal access to resources could raise yields on women's farms by 20 to 30 per cent. Maharashtra's new law, which issues a 'Woman Farmer Certificate' regardless of land ownership, finally puts into practice the activity-based definition of a farmer set out in the National Policy for Farmers of 2007. The hand that sows is at last to be counted alongside the hand that holds the title.

Shared resources show the third mechanism. In the mid-1960s India lived 'from ship to mouth' on imported American wheat. The farmers of Punjab, using the new high-yielding seeds, made the country self-sufficient in grain. The nation's hunger was solved with Punjab's water. Today the State draws about 152 per cent of its extractable groundwater, and 72 per cent of its 153 blocks are in the red zone. As the water table falls, smallholders who cannot afford deeper tube-wells end up buying water from larger neighbours. The farmers who fed the country now pay twice, once to grow the crop and again for the water beneath their own fields.

The pattern reaches the next generation too. The child of a farm labourer often leaves home before any meal is cooked, and a school lunch comes too late for a hungry morning. Tamil Nadu has treated this as public business for a century, from

P. Theagaraya Chetty's meals in Madras corporation schools in 1922, through K. Kamaraj's expansion, to a breakfast scheme started in 2022 that a different government has now extended to Classes 6 to 8, covering 34.64 lakh children. Feeding the feeder's child is one of the cheapest corrections a state can make, and one of the most lasting.

The pattern is not limited to food. The Indian cavalrymen who took Haifa on 23 September 1918 still see their credit disputed by scholars who give it to British and Australian troops, a sign of how imperial memory ranked soldiers by race. Whoever does the foundational work tends to stand furthest from where value and credit are shared out.

The counter-position is serious. Markets pay for scarcity and risk, not for moral worth. The restaurant rupee pays for cooks, rent and service; in the United States the farm share of spending on food eaten out is just 4 per cent. The same study notes that gherkin farmers earn only 3 to 5 per cent of the retail price and still make more than tomato growers, whose share is higher. Nor is the Indian farmer forgotten by the state, which spends heavily on minimum support prices, free power and income transfers; in Punjab, free power is part of why the aquifer is draining. And ever since W. Arthur Lewis's 1954 model of economic development, economists have argued that prosperity comes from moving labour out of farming into more productive work. Romanticising the feeder can trap him where he is.

Yet the objection ends up supporting the essay's real claim. The issue is not the size of the share but who has the power to bargain for it. Gherkin growers do well because they are tied into contracts with buyers, and Amul's farmers because they own the plant. Subsidies that follow the land title or the pump reach the biggest owner, not the woman or the tenant who does the work. So the remedy is not to fix prices out of sentiment. It is to record the cultivator, help farmers own the businesses downstream through cooperatives and producer companies, price scarce groundwater so that the deepest pump does not simply win, and treat a hungry child as a public responsibility. Article 39(b) of the Constitution asks that material resources be distributed to serve the common good, and Article 47 makes raising nutrition a primary duty of the state.

Hori's wish was a small one. A society should measure its fairness not by the size of its harvest but by whether the people who bring it in eat well, own what they work and are counted when benefits are handed out. The hand that feeds does not need to be first at the table. It only needs a place there that no one can take away.

Built from today's cards: Maharashtra's Women Farmers' Law Recognises Landless Women as Farmers Through a 'Woman Farmer Certificate' · Punjab Draws 152% of Its Extractable Groundwater, and Falling Water Tables Shift Wealth to Large Farmers · Farmers Get 57.8% of the Food Rupee Spent at Home, Only 8.4% When Eating Out · Tamil Nadu Extends Free School Breakfast to Classes 6-8, Taking Coverage to 34.64 Lakh Children · Tharoor Revisits the 1918 Battle of Haifa: Celebrated by India and Israel, Resented by Palestinians